

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 186 414

SP 016 031

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 TITLE Strengthening Technical Assistance to the National Diffusion Network.
 INSTITUTION Dingle Associates, Inc., Washington, D.C.
 SPONS AGENCY Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C. Office of Evaluation and Dissemination.
 PUB DATE Feb 80
 NOTE 124p.
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC05 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS Cooperative Planning; *Delivery Systems; Educational Resources; Government Role; Information Dissemination; *Institutional Characteristics; Needs Assessment; *Networks; *Organizational Objectives; Program Evaluation; Program Implementation; Research Utilization; *Technical Assistance
 IDENTIFIERS *National Diffusion Network

ABSTRACT

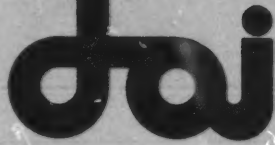
This report contains a review and analysis of technical assistance given to the National Diffusion Network (NDN) by the Technical Assistance Advisory Group (TAAG). Following an outline of TAAG's aims and methods, the history of technical assistance to the NDN is reviewed. Current activities of the technical assistance contractors are outlined and clients' evaluations of these activities are summarized. The needs for technical assistance are discussed, and characteristics of effective technical assistance systems are described. Possible changes in the NDN and their implications for future technical assistance are analyzed. Recommendations are made for government actions and for future technical assistance contractor activity. (JD)

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**STRENGTHENING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO THE
NATIONAL DIFFUSION NETWORK**

REPORT OF THE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ADVISORY GROUP:

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Submitted to the Office of Evaluation and Dissemination,
U.S. Office of Education

February 1980

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

STRENGTHENING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO THE NATIONAL DIFFUSION NETWORK

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the observations, analyses, and recommendations of the Technical Assistance Advisory Group (TAAG), a panel convened by the U.S. Office of Education to give advice on future technical assistance to the National Diffusion Network (NDN). The NDN is a federally funded system that assists school districts and other educational agencies in adopting or adapting exemplary educational programs. Information and training related to these programs are provided by their developers, called Developer/Demonstrators (DD's), who are linked to potential adopters by State Facilitators (SF's). The DD's and SF's now receive technical assistance under two contracts that are due to expire in 1980.

The members of TAAG have gathered data by interviewing the providers of technical assistance (for the most part, onsite at their offices); by interviewing a large sample of SF's and DD's by telephone; by interviewing Federal program officers and other Federal officials; and by reviewing historical materials.

This executive summary begins with a synopsis of TAAG's recommendations (which appear in more detailed form and are fully discussed in Chapter 7 of the report). It then summarizes the report's first six chapters, which contain the following background material:

- an introduction that briefly describes the NDN, the rationale for TAAG's work, and TAAG's aims and methods;
- a history of technical assistance to the NDN;
- a description of services provided by the current technical assistance contractors and a summary of the clients' and Federal officials' views of the quality and usefulness of these services;
- a summary of current needs for technical assistance, with special emphasis on those that are reportedly most severe or still unmet;
- a discussion of characteristics of an effective technical assistance system; and
- a set of options for the future composition of the NDN, the roles of its members, and its mission, together with the implications of these options for technical assistance.

Recommendations

Technical assistance to the NDN should be more clearly thought out, more centrally coordinated and accountable, and more proactive. This would not mean an abandonment of informality or flexibility, qualities rightly prized in the NDN. Nor does TAAG wish to slight the impressive contributions the current contractors are making. However, still more effective technical assistance would result from a single contract with clear subcontracting arrangements, coordinated setting of priorities, and elimination of any unneeded activities.

The following actions on the part of the government or the contractor can strengthen and improve technical assistance to the NDN:

- The government should award a single contract for technical assistance, which would include and integrate all the services now provided under two separate contracts. A single contractor should not centrally carry out all services but should be centrally accountable for decentralized service provision. This is TAAG's strongest recommendation, and it is made with full recognition of the difficult choices it may entail during the bidding and award processes. The rationale for this recommendation is that effective coordination of technical assistance services is essential, and that effective coordination depends upon contractual ties among all providers of technical assistance.
- The contract should be awarded for 3 to 5 years, during which time the contractor should continually evaluate and improve the services.
- The technical assistance budget should be about 10 percent of the NDN's total budget and should rise to a higher percentage to cover the new services that will be needed if the NDN grows. About one-third of the budget should be spent on publications and media. As little as possible should be spent on recordkeeping. The budget should have flexibility to cover emerging needs.
- The contractor's staff should be able to help DD's and SF's develop materials. It should also contain expertise in staff development, organizational development, evaluation, and working with new NDN clients.
- The contractor should have an advisory board including NDN members.
- Recordkeeping and documentation should be minimized.
- A geographically decentralized-regionalized technical assistance system is most appropriate for the NDN. A central component of the system should have a number of formal responsibilities, however. These include administration, planning, development of a resource bank, publications, public relations, and evaluation. The decentralized-regionalized components should be responsible for most of the direct work with clients: needs assessments, frequent contact and support, and promotion of Regional linkages among NDN members and between the NDN and outside resources.
- Some especially important technical assistance functions include: development and use of a consultant resource bank; use of experienced DD's and SF's to work with newer NDN members; some work on a state-by-state or content area basis; a combination of group meetings and individual aid; orientation to all services for clients and Federal officials; outreach to school decisionmakers, legislators, colleges and universities, professional associations, intermediate agencies, teachers' centers, and the general public; communication and assistance related to new Federal policies on evaluation; creation of forums and task forces to capture the expertise of NDN members; and assistance to the government and NDN members in defining and addressing network-wide issues.

- One program officer should monitor all technical assistance activities and inform his or her Federal colleagues about these activities.
- The contractor should communicate frequently with all program officers.
- The Division of Educational Replication should examine the long-range consequences of growth in the NDN and should develop a long-range plan for disseminating exemplary educational practices, with special attention to alternatives to full-scale replication of projects.

TAAG: Background and Methods

The five members of TAAG were asked to examine the structure and effectiveness of the current technical assistance contractors in order to recommend future improvements in technical assistance. The questions posed to the group dealt with the functioning of different components of technical assistance, their effectiveness with clients, unmet needs or duplications in service, and alternative ways of providing technical assistance.

To address these questions, TAAG gathered two kinds of data. First, historical materials were reviewed---RFP's, contracts, memoranda, publications, reports, and evaluations. Second, TAAG members interviewed people with many different perspectives. These included a wide range of clients---a total of 35 SF's and 65 DD's, varying extensively in geographic location, length of experience in the NDN, size of project (for SF's), type of program (for DD's), etc. The providers of technical assistance were interviewed in person, generally onsite at their offices. Fourteen Federal program officers were interviewed in person.

History of the NDN's Technical Assistance

TAAG recognizes that future technical assistance must evolve out of the context of the NDN in general and its previous technical assistance in particular. This report therefore discusses the way the NDN has functioned since its inception in 1973, and the series of arrangements for technical assistance that began in 1976. The NDN has clearly been a growing, developing system that has benefited from its Federal sponsors' reluctance to prescribe standardized procedures. It is also a loosely coupled system, with many communication channels and few relationships of power or authority.

These characteristics of the NDN have favored somewhat informal, ad hoc, and decentralized arrangements for technical assistance. They also provide a context in which lessons can be learned and mistakes corrected. The current contractors are working to overcome what are now viewed as mistaken strategies in some of the early technical assistance arrangements: an excessive emphasis on meeting Federal needs; an exclusive reliance on one-to-one consultant assistance; and a reactive stance toward clients. The contractors have also had their work disrupted by the necessity of responding to short-term RFP's.

Current Technical Assistance Services

The two contracts for technical assistance are now held by the Technical Assistance Base (TAB) and the ED Materials/Support Center. TAB is a consortium of a Central Service Unit (CSU) with administrative and system-building responsibilities and five subcontractors called Regional Service Units (RSU's) that deliver most services to clients.

The services include:

- consultation from a resource bank of consultants, offered in person (often at the client's site) or by telephone;
- workshops for groups of clients on topics of widespread concern such as evaluation, leadership-management, and public relations;
- meetings for discussion and joint problem solving among clients; and
- materials that include resource packages, newsletters, and calendars.

Important trends in TAB's work are the development of "task analyses" for assessing SFs' and DDs' needs; increasing proactivity in identifying common needs; more use of group sessions rather than one-on-one consultation; and training of regional cadres of consultants on special topics.

The ED Center develops and distributes products, mainly printed materials, for NDN members and the broader public. These products are intended not only to provide factual information, but also to increase the internal cohesion of the NDN and publicize it to the educational community. The dozens of products include Educational Programs That Work (a directory of all projects validated as exemplary), a directory of SF's, handbooks, videotapes, newsletters, and comparison charts summarizing key features of DD's in particular content areas.

For the most part, clients appear satisfied with the technical assistance provided by both contractors. They commend TAB for helpfulness, responsiveness, its choice of priority topics, and the amount of assistance offered. Many, but not all, approve of TAB's increased proactivity, and the specific regional workshops draw a predictably wide range of reactions. The ED Center draws praise for the high quality and usefulness of its products and for the contributions its leadership has made to the total operation of the NDN.

On the negative side, some clients rarely use TAB's services; some believe these services do not address their needs, others are discouraged by the paperwork burden associated with services. There is a general feeling that too many meetings are probably being held. Similarly, the ED Center is sometimes criticized for generating too many materials. Most clients would not like to see the budget for technical assistance expanded---undoubtedly recognizing that such an expansion would divert funds from the total available for their own support. Both contractors seem to have done too little in two respects: orienting clients to how to use their services; and, most importantly, coordinating with each others' operations.

Another source of comments on current technical assistance was the program officers in the Office of Education. While this group expressed diverse reactions, one common theme was that program officers have had too little information about technical assistance.

Perceived Needs for Technical Assistance

Based on TAAG's interviews with SF's, DD's, providers of technical assistance, and Federal officials, the following needs emerged as most serious:

- Evaluation is clearly the most pressing area of need. Many NDN members lack the knowledge, skills, or measurement tools to meet Federal expectations in evaluation. The DD's, in particular, also perceive that their funds and staff are inadequate to monitor the quality of adoptions (some-

times at dozens of adopting sites).

- NDN members need more and better communication with each other.
- Specific skills are needed in packaging and marketing materials and in management skills.
- Federal priorities sometimes seem unclear or unrealistic, leading to a need for assistance in understanding what the Office of Education wants or in conveying the field's concerns to Washington.
- New DD's have the greatest need for assistance.
- Experienced NDN members need help in improving and monitoring the quality of adoptions.

Some unmet needs were identified. These include: more advance planning for technical assistance; coordinated planning among technical assistance agencies; wider visibility and more linkage for the NDN in relation to other school-improvement agencies and networks; clarification of what is a high-quality adoption and how adaptation may take place; and more supportive contacts with Federal program officers and other NDN members.

Characteristics of an Effective Technical Assistance System

This report outlines some features that are needed in all educational technical assistance systems, as well as suggesting what features are especially appropriate for a system serving the NDN. All technical assistance systems are communications networks. To communicate effectively with the NDN, such a network must take account of the nature of the NDN's members and of their political and logistical environment--- which includes their funding agencies, their parent organizations, and the educational agencies they work with. It should be organized to rely on a bank of consultants who are identified and mobilized by the internal staff; the reasons for using this structure include the size and geographic dispersion of the NDN, the need for rapid and high-volume assistance, and the availability of consultants.

Any technical assistance system must carry out the following functions:

- maintaining liaison with all relevant organizations and networks in its clients' environment;
- disseminating information tailored to many audiences; and
- building its clients' capacity to use its services.

The membership and internal dynamics of a technical assistance system should have these features: an advisory board, a mix of process-oriented and product-oriented personnel, low staff turnover, rapid delivery of services, and clear but flexible agreements with clients.

On four important dimensions of operating style, a technical assistance system must adjust to the needs and style of the NDN:

- It should combine active and passive approaches, with more emphasis on the active side.

- It should be regionalized rather than centralized.
- It should maintain a fairly low profile as a "secondary" actor in the NDN.
- It should be content laden rather than content free.

Alternative Assumptions about the NDN's Future

Some principles for the immediate future of technical assistance to the NDN are clear. Over the longer term, however, several developments could change what is required from a technical assistance system. A chapter of this report offers specific suggestions for technical assistance under each of many possible future circumstances. The overriding point is that the technical assistance system must have the flexibility to anticipate and adapt to whatever circumstances do evolve, such as:

- a growing---or shrinking---NDN;
- DD's that are more active, entrepreneurial builders of networks;
or DD's that take considerably reduced roles;
- SF's that are more closely tied to SEA's;
- adopters who form their own networks, become turnkey trainers, or become clients for technical assistance;
- a modified mission for the whole NDN, such as educational improvement through inservice training, or promotion of "information-based school improvement."

Concluding Observations

The members of TAAG want to emphasize their respect for the vitality of the NDN and for its ability to contribute to the improvement of American education. Effective technical assistance can contribute to this important work by increasing NDN members' knowledge, skills, and confidence, and by strengthening the NDN's connections to the educational community and the general public. The recommendations in this report are intended to improve the efficiency and usefulness of technical assistance to the NDN. They should be implemented carefully, without disrupting the impressive capacity for evolutionary development that the NDN and its technical assistance contractors have displayed.

REPORT OF THE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ADVISORY GROUP

CHAPTER 1
I
INTRODUCTION

In July 1979, the Office of Evaluation and Dissemination in the U.S. Office of Education formed a five-member panel to re-examine the technical assistance component of the National Diffusion Network (NDN). Since the current contracts for technical assistance to the NDN will expire in 1980, the Office of Education is preparing a Request for Proposals (RFP) for future technical assistance. Thus the panel, the Technical Assistance Advisory Group (TAAG), has developed recommendations for steps the government and the chosen contractor should take---in the RFP process and later---to improve the effectiveness of technical assistance to the NDN.

By way of background, a few facts about the NDN may be helpful here. The NDN is a federally funded system that assists local school districts around the country in adopting or adapting exemplary educational programs. The developers of these programs, called Developer/Demonstrators (DD's), receive funding only after a Federal group, the Joint Dissemination Review Panel (JDRP), has approved their programs' evidence of effectiveness. The DD's publicize their programs, train interested educators, and follow up the results attained at adopting sites. Other NDN members, State Facilitators (SF's), work with educational agencies in their states and regions to help match DD resources with local needs. Since 1976, various arrangements have been made for providing technical assistance to SF's and DD's---and, secondarily, to other client groups that participate in or complement the NDN's school improvement efforts.

Technical assistance is currently provided under two contracts from the Office of Education. One contractor is the Technical Assistance Brokerage (TAB), a consortium of a central contractor and five regional subcontractors; the other is the ED Materials/Support Center. The Office of Education convened TAAG to advise it on what technical assistance efforts should follow the 1980 expiration of these contracts.

This report, the product of TAAG's review and analysis of technical assistance to the NDN, has seven chapters. This introduction outlines TAAG's aims and methods. The second chapter reviews the history of technical assistance to the NDN. In the third chapter, current activities of the technical assistance contractors are outlined and the clients' evaluations of these activities are summarized. The fourth chapter discusses the needs of the SF's and DD's for technical assistance, with emphasis on the needs that seem most intense and those that are reportedly still unmet. Providing a more general view of technical assistance, Chapter 5 discusses characteristics of effective technical assistance systems. The sixth chapter analyzes possible changes in the NDN and their implications for future technical assistance. Drawing on all this material---past experiences, current services and client reactions to them, client needs, principles of effective technical assistance, and anticipated developments---the seventh chapter recommends actions for the government and the next technical assistance contractor to take. Each recommendation is accompanied by the observations and rationale that support it and by any cautions or conditions associated with it. The appendices list the members of TAAG and provide copies of the protocols used to guide data collection.

The Office of Education's Charge to the Panel

TAAG¹ was asked to examine the structure and effectiveness of the ED Materials/Support Center and the Technical Assistance Brokerage with a view toward devising ways to strengthen and improve technical assistance to the NDN. Questions of concern included:

- How well is each technical assistance component working?
- How effectively have DD and SF training and assistance needs been met?
- What is the quality of the relationships between assistance providers and clients?
- Are the materials produced by ED and TAP useful and effective?
- Does the technical assistance have the effect of improving the capabilities and skills of NDN participants?
- Are there needs for technical assistance that are not being met?
- Are the assistance components duplicating services already available to NDN participants?
- Should support for the two components be continued, expanded, altered?
- Should some alternative configuration of technical assistance and support be created?

Data Base

TAAG collected data of two kinds:

- Historical documents---RFP's, contracts, memos, papers, reports, and evaluations.

¹

See Appendix A for TAAG members.

- Interviews---

- a) 35 SF's were interviewed by telephone.
- b) 65 DD's were interviewed by telephone.
- c) 14 Federal program officers were interviewed in person.
- d) All TAB staff members were interviewed, most of them onsite.
- e) The ED Center staff was interviewed onsite.

The protocols used to guide these interviews appear in an appendix B in this report. The questions can be summarized as follows:

- ED and TAB staff members were asked about their clients, goals, budgets, scheduling of services, staffing and organization, history, relationships with other organizations and agencies, problems and constraints, strategies, and effectiveness.
- Technical assistance clients, the SF's and DD's, were asked about their experiences with the current contractors and their recommendations for new or modified services. They were asked how they have used the services and materials provided by TAB and the ED Center, how they rate them on helpfulness and timeliness, what technical assistance they expect to need in the coming year, what sources they use other than TAB and the ED Center, and how they would like to see the government change its arrangements for providing them with technical assistance.
- Federal program officers were asked about their perceptions of what technical assistance is being offered and what else might be needed. In addition, the program officers were asked about their own roles in assisting DD's and SF's, and their interactions with the technical assistance contractors.

Data-gathering responsibilities were evenly divided among the panel members. The interview assignments were arranged so that each member of TAAG gained exposure to a wide range of clients (varying in geographic

location, length of experience in the NDN, type of program, etc.), to at least one and as many as four of the agencies providing technical assistance, and to one or more Federal program officers.

The interviewees were assured that their responses would remain confidential, and the data gathered would be summarized but not associated with particular interviewees.

CHAPTER 2
HISTORY OF THE NDN'S TECHNICAL
ASSISTANCE

Technical assistance to the National Diffusion Network has evolved in a way that reflects the relatively informal, constantly developing nature of the system it serves. While the National Diffusion Network has maintained essentially the same structure since its inception in 1973---it has always divided responsibilities between the DD's and the SF's, for example---it has grown significantly, and its members' work has changed. The Federal program office has deliberately issued very few mandates, preferring to rely on the creativity of NDN members to develop effective roles and procedures---even in relatively technical and controversial areas such as evaluation. Thus, standardized procedures are rare in this network (although they are increasing as the membership expands). DD's have generally invented their own techniques for making educators aware of their programs and for training those who become interested. SF's interact with local districts and state agencies in whatever way suits their own ideas about school improvement and the educational and political traditions of their states. The network as a whole is a loosely coupled system, with multiple, informal communication channels and few relationships of power or authority.

Like the NDN itself, technical assistance to the NDN has changed over the years. The history of technical assistance operations has shown several recurring concerns such as: establishing a broadly based operation to reach as many NDN members as possible; maintaining an

appropriate distance from the functions of the Federal program office; and finding balances between centralization and regionalization and between proactivity and reactivity. As a prelude to the later chapters that discuss how the current system addresses such concerns and then present TRAG's recommendations, this chapter will briefly review how technical assistance has evolved in the NDN and what has been learned from past experiences.

Technical assistance was launched as the result of an unexpected opportunity---funds that were available for use at the end of fiscal 1976. These funds, awarded to the Far West Laboratory in San Francisco under an 18-month contract, supported the Educational Diffusion project (ED). This project initiated, or for the first time centralized, the following activities:

- preparation and distribution of a catalog of JDRP-approved projects, a newsletter, and other materials for NDN members;
- production and dissemination of materials to publicize the NDN to the educational community;
- provision of some direct technical support to members, chiefly consisting of critiques of project materials;
- assistance to the NDN's Federal sponsors in building collaboration with other Federal program offices.

An evaluation of the NDN concluded in 1977 that technical assistance was indeed useful to NDN members. However, it criticized ED for concentrating too much on Federal needs as opposed to NDN members'

needs, and it suggested that future technical assistance might be split into two parts---one oriented primarily to Washington, one to the field.

In mid-1976, anticipating the expiration of ED's contract, the Office of Education surveyed NDN members on what technical assistance they needed and how they would recommend structuring a system to provide it. The respondents requested training on a wide variety of topics. They also wanted direct assistance in preparing their materials. Although many commended ED's work, many said they would prefer to receive help from NDN members instead. The respondents tended to favor a system of regional service centers with some degree of national coordination.

Having reviewed the NDN evaluation and these suggestions, officials in the Office of Education issued an RFP for training and technical assistance. This RFP reflected several decisions:

- The function of producing materials was to be lodged in a different contract, separate from the one for technical assistance.
- The technical assistance contractor was to analyze the skills needed in dissemination and to base a taxonomy of technical assistance services on this analysis.
- Technical assistance would be provided by a resource bank of consultants working one-to-one and with groups. The contractor itself would provide little or no technical assistance---no more than 5 percent of the total services delivered.
- The system would be almost totally reactive, governed by client requests.

The successful bidder on this 1977 RFP was TAB, a consortium of six agencies: the prime contractor, Capla Associates, would conceptualize and organize the regionally based services of five agencies. Four of these agencies also worked as SF's; the fifth was a project at the Far West Laboratory. Although the TAB system has changed substantially since its first year, its early characteristics are worth mentioning:

- TAB operated as a highly decentralized set of autonomous organizations.
- Virtually all technical assistance was provided by consultants on a one-to-one basis.
- Capla Associates concentrated much of its effort on developing a highly detailed skill taxonomy.
- The system was essentially reactive. Members of the NDN were expected to figure out their needs and to request consulting help; those who did not were typically left alone.

During TAB's first year of operation a subnetwork within the NDN, consisting of 21 Title I projects, received technical assistance from another agency. The approach of this Title I Support Services project (TISS) differed quite a bit from the way TAB then worked. While TISS did arrange onsite consultant services for its clients, its operating style was more proactive than TAB's, and more services came from the TISS project itself and from peer sharing. The 21 clients were encouraged to stay in regular contact with TISS and each other in order to share their problems and successes. TISS, in other words, was as much a direct helper and a network builder as a broker of outside expertise.

TAB's characteristics began to change in its second year of operation (1978-79), when it was operating under a new contract. These changes appeared in its structure and activities:

- Communication and joint efforts among the regional units increased. "System building" became a hallmark of the central unit's efforts.
- The emphasis on individual consultant services was partly supplanted by a new strategy of designing group workshops around common needs.
- The system became more proactive in assessing NDN members' needs and inviting them to participate in TAB activities that could be relevant to these needs.
- Some experienced NDN members were invited to collaborate on issue-oriented task forces, on such topics as rural concerns and computer use.

In short, TAB has changed considerably during its brief history--- and, indeed, the next chapter of this report indicates that further changes are currently taking place. While TAB staffers are pleased that they have been able to take a developmental approach to their work, they regret the upheaval caused by short-term contracts. Starting over in the second year may have facilitated a clean break with what are now viewed as some unproductive strategies, but developing and negotiating a new proposal reduced the opportunity for more substantive work with NDN members.

Meanwhile, since 1977, materials for the NDN have been produced and distributed under a separate contract with the ED Materials Center at Far West Laboratory. One issue for the ED Center has been the procedure

for determining what materials are needed. Under the original contract, the Federal government was the source of nearly all specifications for products. This has changed over the years with an increased use of mail and telephone surveys, and with the ED Center staff's growing experience with the way clients use materials. One long-term frustration for this staff, however, has been the limited opportunity for face-to-face contact with NDN members. Another frustration has been the continual need to explain the different roles of ED and TAB---especially to explain that the ED Center handles centralized materials production but that it cannot assist individual projects with the development of their own materials.

This brief history serves as background to a description and analysis of the technical assistance that the ED Center and TAB now provide. The next chapter deals with these current services.

CHAPTER 3

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES NOW PROVIDED BY TAB AND ED MATERIALS/SUPPORT CENTER

This chapter describes the technical assistance activities now conducted for the NDN, including both topics and strategies or modes of assistance. Activities conducted by TAB and the ED Center are discussed separately. Also, other sources of assistance for NDN members are briefly discussed. Following these descriptions is a summary of the way clients characterize the quality and usefulness of the assistance they receive.

TAB

Structure. The Technical Assistance Base provides assistance through a consortium in which Capla Associates, the prime contractor, is called the Central Service Unit (CSU), and five subcontracting agencies act as Regional Service Units (RSUs). Three of the RSUs serve as State Facilitators in addition to carrying out their TAB responsibilities; they are the New Hampshire Facilitator Center, the EXCHANGE in Minneapolis, and Educational Services, Inc., in South Carolina (which also serves as Virginia's State Facilitator). Other RSU's are located at the University of Texas at Dallas and at the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development. This last RSU, working in the western part of the country, has created a sub-regional structure of two field coordinating units that work with geographic subsets of clients. The RSU's and field units tend to be in frequent, personal contact with their clients. For most SF's and DD's, technical assistance seems to be defined as "what the RSU does."

The CSU maintains TAB's records and tries to build coordination and collaboration within TAB. It controls the budget, manages much of the paperwork, works toward standardization of routines and forms, and negotiates the major contract with the Office of Education. Central missions of the CSU's operations are efficiency and system building. The CSU convenes the "TAB consortium" of RSU staff, on at least a bimonthly basis, for planning, and CSU staff members are in very frequent telephone contact with RSU staff members.

Services. TAB's technical assistance can be divided into the following five categories:

1. Consultation---primarily direct consultation with the staff members of individual projects, through site visits, telephone contact, or provision of written materials or products. TAB has created a bank of resource consultants, including persons inside and outside the NDN, who offer consultation. Staff members in the RSU's provide much of the telephone contact and distribute most written materials. Some individualized project consultation is "piggybacked" on group sessions held by the RSU's.

2. Workshops/Conferences/Presentations---for groups of project personnel. Common topics for sessions include: evaluation, leadership-management, public relations, resource acquisition, orientation-awareness, and collaboration with other agencies. Each RSU conducts several workshops and meetings each year. A national conference is generally held once a year.

3. Sharing Meetings---group sessions for discussion among NDN members. Topics tend to be similar to those listed above, and represent areas of common interest as revealed in the needs assessments that TAB conducts. Some special topics, such as rural concerns and computer utilization, have also been focal points for meetings of SF's and DD's.

4. Resource Packages---materials prepared and distributed, including workshop packets, resource lists, manuals, forms, reprints of journal articles, etc. These are often distributed at workshops to provide more depth of coverage of workshop topics.

5. Newsletters and Calendars---distributed by some RSU's alerting DD's and SF's to NDN activities in the region and to available technical assistance and training opportunities.

Several recent trends in the technical assistance provided by TAB are noteworthy:

- Increasingly, technical assistance is based on systematic assessments of DD and SF needs. Structured "task analyses" provide a framework for planning technical assistance services.
- Technical assistance is becoming more proactive, especially for new DD's; it is organized around "strands" of concerns that have been identified through experience. The "strands" have become organizing themes around which the RSU's develop their technical assistance.

- Technical assistance is being offered less often through one-on-one consultation and more often through group sessions. This is partly an economy measure, and reflects as well the increasing predictability of the major technical needs of beginning SF's and DD's. Some observers also believe that the early emphasis on one-on-one onsite consultation was necessary to build trust before a great many group sessions could be held.
- RSU's are seeking training from "cadres" of consultants from their own regions on various topics of major importance within NDN, such as evaluation and leadership. In this way, they hope to assure their clients immediate access to help on these topics and lessen their dependence on national rosters of consultants and trainers.

ED Materials/Support Center

Another important component of the NDN technical assistance system is the ED Materials/Support Center, a project of the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development in San Francisco. Initiated in 1977, the ED Center was conceptualized as an integral part of national-scope technical assistance to NDN members. However, it is contracted separately and operates independently from TAB.

The ED Center develops and distributes products, mainly printed materials, for NDN members and the broader public. In addition to serving technical functions, the ED Center resources are intended to build cohesiveness within the NDN and to give visibility to the NDN in the broader educational community. While the budget of the ED Center would appear to be substantial (\$600,000 per year), the size of the contract is misleading because of the nature of the Center's work. It is principally a printing, publications, and information dissemination

operation. The staff is small, and many staff members are quite isolated from NDN activity as well as from TAB. Lacking the funds to attend NDN workshops and conferences, the staff has limited opportunities to assess NDN members' objectives, needs, and issues.

The principal publication of the ED Center is Education Programs That Work, now in its 6th edition. This volume goes to all NDN members, many Federal and state offices, many local school agencies, and, on request or by distribution through NDN members, to many individuals. It is sometimes described as "the bible" of the NDN system. It is a compendium of currently validated projects and constitutes the basic inventory of model projects available for review and adoption by school systems. In addition, a directory of State Facilitators, State Facilitator Profiles, now in its 5th edition, has been developed for use by NDN members and other agencies and organizations interested in accessing NDN activities.

Several dozen other products are included in the ED Center catalog. These include guides for DD's who wish to produce their own materials, directories of DD's and SF's, videotapes introducing the NDN and the JDRP process, special comparison charts covering programs in fields such as reading, career education, mathematics, and special education---and more. The bimonthly ED Newsletter goes to more than 5,000 individuals, as does the NDN Reporter, also a bimonthly publication. A regular newsletter, calendars of events, and several special publications emanate from San Francisco, some on special request, to assist in developing a common information "folklore" among NDN members.

Other Sources of Technical Assistance

DD's and SF's vary greatly in the extent of their use of technical assistance from agencies other than TAB or the ED Center. Some DD's and SF's are employed in settings that are richly staffed with media specialists, administrators, curriculum leaders, and others. Many are associated with intermediate agencies or with consortium arrangements of school districts and universities, which tend to bring together staffs with expertise in training, leadership, and service. Similarly, those associated with State Departments of Education can tap the wide-ranging resources of those settings. NDN members who operate from any of these bases tend to use their local resources and to ask for only the most sophisticated forms of service from TAB.

In contrast, some other NDN members work from extremely isolated situations where there is neither expert advice nor contact with colleagues. For example, one DD who was interviewed lives in an isolated, rural area in a community of less than 200 people. The sense of personal contact and support received from the RSU and from the ED Center materials are perhaps at least as important to this DD as are the more technical services.

Many SF's and some DD's are involved in complex linkages with other dissemination systems. The addition of subnetworks within NDN---groups of projects with shared subject matters and shared Federal funding sources---increases the number of external contacts that NDN members use for technical assistance since the subnetwork members communicate with their professional associations and with their Federal and State program offices.

Thus, the technical assistance resources available to SF's and DD's vary substantially. Some clients depend exclusively on TAB and the ED Center, while others have trouble choosing among alternative sources of advice and help that surround them.

Views of SF's and DD's on TAB and the ED Center

TAB. Evaluations of TAB's activities are conducted frequently by the CSU. They indicate favorable response by users to all forms of technical assistance. Conferences, for example, usually are rated above 4 on a 5-point scale (5 is high) on all dimensions.

The interviews conducted by TAAG indicate that most DD's and SF's who use TAB's services appear satisfied with the assistance they get. They commend the RSU's for responsiveness, and they find most services helpful. Their specific judgments on TAB's priorities and methods are reported below. However, some general criticisms recurred in the interviews: Clients would like to see TAB do more advance planning, offer more orientation to the services that are available, and do more to effectively link people who have similar problems.

Another general issue is that some SF's and DD's rarely use TAB. In some cases, this is due to restrictions on their travel (due to state policies or limited budgets), while in others the clients perceive that TAB does not offer what they need, or that arranging to receive help would be "more trouble than the help is worth." In still other cases,

clients feel that their time is too limited to take advantage of opportunities for technical assistance.

The topics given most attention by TAB are generally appropriate for SF's and DD's. Evaluation is the topic of prime concern at this time, and all parties say that it is the Federal Government's concern for more evaluation and documentation that has made this so. In particular, a recent Federal emphasis on the quality of adoptions, as opposed to quantity, has increased NDN members' attention to---and anxiety about---evaluation. Clients agree on the importance of concentrating technical assistance on new DD's, whose major concerns are awareness activities and communication within the NDN. Later in their development, clients agree, DD's need help on different topics such as leadership and training of trainers.

DD's and SF's, in general, appreciate the amount of assistance they receive. They like the opportunities provided through RSU's for personalized contacts. Many would appreciate even more personalized assistance, particularly onsite, need-specific, practical, high-quality help. On the other hand, given a chance to redistribute NDN resources most DD's and SF's probably would not give high priority to any form of technical assistance. Their prime concern seems to be for additional funding for their own work.

The move by RSU's to structure technical assistance around "strands" of activities (topic areas such as evaluation and leadership) receives mixed reactions. Some SF's and DD's say that this approach represents a creative response to the realities of NDN development; others react negatively to this departure from the more individual request-oriented strategies of the past. Recent national conferences receive high marks for content, but the large size of the conferences is seen as a problem by some. Regional conferences are rated variously "good" and "bad," the only fairly common theme voiced by clients being that there probably are too many meetings in the NDN. TAB's resource materials go almost without mention by DD's and SF's. If asked specifically to comment on these materials, they dismiss most of them as mildly interesting but not essential to their work.

From the view of DD's and SF's, the CSU is little known and even less understood. The role of CSU in helping to manage national conferences is poorly understood. The CSU is viewed by its direct clients, the RSU's, as supportive and non-directive. They are pleased that it does not generate a lot of competitiveness among them. However, criticism of the CSU for excesses of reporting and paperwork is regularly expressed. Views within the NDN on the desirability of more programmatic leadership by the CSU are varied. Some believe the CSU should extend its leadership and coordination functions---for example, by arranging system-wide work on "strands" of activity. Others think this extension would be undesirable and might tend to undermine RSU leadership or discourage initiatives on the part of other NDN members.

The ED Center. NDN members, particularly SF's, view the ED Center products as helpful, timely, and of high quality. The products not only contain needed information but also contribute to a sense of collegiality that suits the informal networking style of the NDN. The staff is perceived as high-caliber, experienced, and energetic. Moreover, the leadership of the ED Center is widely commended, by NDN members for contributing very substantially and imaginatively to the total operation of the NDN.

However, from the individual SF or DD perspective, the ED Center is seen as somewhat remote---that is, most clients express surprise when the ED Center is characterized as a technical assistance program. The Center is more often viewed as passive to individual NDN members' needs and principally a publications arm of the Division of Educational Replication in the Office of Education---sort of a miniature Government Printing Office with a special fondness for NDN members.

Several concerns about the ED Center were expressed despite the generally approving commentary about its quality control and creativity. In summary these concerns are:

- There may be too many publications. DD's and SF's report that they feel super-saturated. Except for EPTW, the NDN Newsletter, the NDN Reporter, the State Facilitator Profiles, and the comparison charts, little else seems much used.
- There is too little coordination between TAB and the ED Center.

- Some publications require training in their use, and this has been lacking. (This is not necessarily a failing on the part of the ED Center staff, since the present work scope does not include this function.)

Views of Program Officers

Another important set of perspectives on the work of TAB and the ED Center is provided by the program officers who monitor the SF's and DD's. This group expressed highly diverse opinions of the current technical assistance operations, but some common themes emerged. Perhaps the most important one is that program officers have had too little information about the technical assistance that "their" projects receive. In the past, they report, they have had little communication with the providers of technical assistance. Although TAB and the ED Center have recently taken steps to remedy this problem---and the steps have been appreciated---continued attention to it will be necessary. The program officers feel that they have valuable suggestions about the needs of particular DD's and SF's, and that they should be kept apprised of what services are available.

There may be a role for a technical assistance contractor in helping to keep program officers abreast of general developments in the NDN. Since NDN members are constantly developing new ways of working, and since the program officers' limited travel budgets preclude very much first-hand acquaintance with the projects, there have been some gaps in communications. A technical assistance system might help fill these gaps. However, program officers are justifiably sensitive to the

possibility that an outside contractor could take over what should be their own functions. Thus, it is very important for the providers of technical assistance to avoid slipping into roles that resemble monitoring of projects or policy-setting for the NDN.

CHAPTER 4

PERCEIVED NEEDS FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

This chapter is based on TAAG's interviews with SF's, DD's, providers of technical assistance, and Federal officials. Its first section summarizes the most serious needs for technical assistance in the NDN. The second section discusses the needs that are not being addressed by the present technical assistance system. A final section calls attention to issues that any technical assistance system will have to face in attempting to meet the NDN's needs.

Clients' Needs

As TAAG interviewed NDN members and knowledgeable observers, a few key needs came up again and again: DD's and SF's need help in evaluation, in communication, in several skills specific to NDN participation, and in understanding what the Federal Government expects of them. In addition, the specific needs of particular client groups were often singled out by interviewees. This section discusses both the substantive topics that were emphasized and also the concerns and needs that characterize new DD's, experienced NDN members, and SF's.

Evaluation. By far, the greatest need expressed by those associated with the NDN is the need for knowledge and skills related to evaluation. This topic has gained recent prominence as a result of the Office of Education's increasing stress on "quality" rather than "quantity" in

evaluations. The message, delivered at a time when all NDN members are applying for continued funding, is that members are responsible for engendering effective adoptions---and for finding out just how effective the adoptions are. NDN members need general knowledge about what evaluation is, more clarity about what Federal expectations are, practical advice about what evaluations are positive and realistic, and solutions to the organizational problem of monitoring multiple adoption sites.

There is concern with the lack of knowledge and skills in evaluation, since most SF's and DD's have concentrated their past efforts on information dissemination and training, which are activities very much unlike evaluation. Furthermore, NDN members believe that they lack the money and staff to accomplish evaluation tasks.

Some experienced DD's are struggling with measurement problems concerning the impact of adoptions---that is, how the adopted programs are actually affecting children, teachers, classrooms, schools, or districts. They want to know what measurement tools are available or can be created to assess impact.

Communication. In a variety of ways, clients express the need for better communication within the NDN. Experienced members want better and closer communication with those having similar problems (problems like training turnkey trainers, weaning adopters, monitoring impact, etc.). Some want to be "used" in leadership capacities, while some in remote areas expressed continuing need for contact with the rest of

the NDN through publications and meetings. New DD's feel isolated and do not know exactly how to make connections with their colleagues. Many DD's perceive that SF's exercise an informal selection process and favor some DD's at the expense of others when they work with potential adopters; the DD's are frustrated by this perceived barrier in communication. Most clients would like to have greater outreach on the part of RSU's.

Skills for NDN responsibilities. Interviewees mentioned a few important areas in which people need specific training if they are to work effectively as DD's or SF's. These include planning adoption strategies, designing and producing attractive materials, planning effective meetings, conducting appropriate followup, and keeping records. In short, many SF's and DD's need specific training in packaging and marketing materials and in management skills.

Coping with Federal priorities. Many NDN members experience some confusion in their dealings with Washington. Some say the priorities for their work often are not made clear by the Office of Education, or that the priorities that are stated are often unrealistic. A case in point might again be the evaluation questions. Given very limited personnel, how can DD's monitor adoption procedures in many states? Who will help collect the data? Who will even help provide a reasonable set of procedures? DD's would welcome technical assistance that would answer these questions or organize a concerted search for answers.

At a minimum, NDN members would like some kind of "translation service" that would convey their concerns to Washington and in turn would help them understand the messages they receive from the Office of Education. For example, members have struggled for years to understand exactly what an "adoption" is. They know that the concept is both vital and poorly defined. They would like to impress the force of their concern on the Office of Education, and they would like more explicit Federal guidance in operationalizing this concept. A good translator would mediate the tension between a vague term (which may be deliberately left vague because an official definition would unduly constrict what the NDN can do for education) and the need for operational guidance.

Needs of new DD's. There is strong agreement on the part of most interviewees that major attention and support from a technical assistance system should go to integrating new DD's into the NDN. New DD's need help in: developing the skills involved in getting adoptions, knowing the basic terminology of the NDN, working with SF's, understanding the dissemination process, packaging their materials and coping with dozens of practical problems. Information and training in these areas should be made available to new people entering the NDN.

Needs of experienced NDN members. Experienced DD's and SF's, who now have a tremendous amount of knowledge about what it takes to get programs adopted, express needs for "high-quality" technical assistance. By this, they mean being able to call someone who can provide a site visit to deal with specific problems or who can send them to the proper resource for help. In general, experienced people stress similar concerns for work on quality adoptions, better understanding and facilitation of the

training of trainers, and realistic procedures for monitoring adoption sites and reporting impact data. Many stress the need for a management system that would help them organize their time and personnel so that their role can change from trainer to trainer-of-trainers.

Needs of SF's. The variety of needs expressed by SF's reflects the enormous complexity of the NDN. Regional differences, role differences, differences in experience and sophistication---all of these are reflected in the continuum of needs. They run from needs for more money and personnel in rural areas, to more contact in remote areas, to quickly accessible summaries of good ideas for experienced SF's. Some SF's express the need for more and better contact with DD's, especially with new DD's. Experienced SF's want to stay "connected" with other NDN members in a way that is informative, yet not time-consuming.

Needs Not Addressed by the Present System

Several needs are identified by our sample as important for the future of the NDN:

- Advance planning. Many interviewees stress the need for calendars, meetings, and publications to be sensitive to the need to plan far ahead of time.
- Linkage to other networks. Several state the need for developing collaborative relationships with colleges and universities, teacher centers, and other agencies responsible for teaching, training, and staff development.

- Joint planning. Many DD's and SF's want the technical assistance agencies to plan jointly among themselves to avoid duplication of effort. They also want to take part in such planning so that technical assistance will not be "second guessing" their needs.
- Strengthened visibility. Several suggest the need for publications and other efforts to build relationships with outside agencies and networks. They say this would strengthen the NDN as a force for school improvement.
- Less burdensome brokerage. An underlying theme of many of our interviewees was that some of the brokerage was meant to be helpful, but verged on being a burden. This referred both to the approach that TAB often takes--- e.g., asking people what they need in an almost "Rogerian" manner---and to the "interminable" paperwork to be completed. There is a continuing need for dialogue, personalized connections, phone calls (as opposed to questionnaires) and impersonal requests for needs.
- Accountability of funds. There is some concern that "many people are making careers" that use technical assistance funds that should go instead to the DD's and SF's. Clients would rather see the money used for specific projects, minigrants, and small group work.
- Program officers and TAB. A high priority need is expressed for capacity building for Office of Education staff members. The program officers are thought to need a better understanding of a field-generated mode vs. a compliance mode if they are to aid the development of the NDN.
- Quality adoptions. The need for adoptions that become institutionalized was made salient by most interviewees. Much discussion needs to go on about the changing norms of what makes an "effective" DD and SF. Confusion persists over the conflicting demands for quantity and quality of adoptions. Another issue that demands study is that of faithful adoption vs. adaptation. The NDN members deal differently with this issue. At least one group of adopters of the same project meets regularly in order to agree on adaptations collectively. Some DD's encourage adaptation; some DD's will not allow it.

- Support Systems. A need is expressed for an organized support system for both DD's and SF's. For many NDN members, the exigencies of daily work create a great need for sharing, for exchanging ideas and resources, and for general support.

Underlying Themes

In this review of needs for technical assistance, TAAG sees themes that reflect the complexity of the NDN. A number of tensions between opposing principles exist. The tensions can be productive or corrosive depending upon the sensitivity of the leadership, their ability to deal with political and economic pressures, the creation of flexible yet accountable organizational procedures, and an understanding of the history of the NDN. The tensions that need to be understood as they relate to technical assistance are:

- Proactive or reactive stance toward giving technical assistance. A more proactive stance appears to be called for but responsiveness remains important.
- Group meetings vs. one-on-one assistance. While meetings are less costly, their cost-effectiveness in relation to that of individual consultation is not clear. Some common needs can be addressed in group sessions, but individual followup and personalized service remain necessary as well.
- New vs. experienced DD's. More technical assistance needs to go to new DD's, but experienced members also have needs.
- Developmental vs. compliance mode. The NDN is clearly a developmental entity, despite the need for accountability.
- Field-generated vs. federally-initiated priorities. Field involvement for program officers and greater representation of NDN members in decisionmaking can ease this tension.
- Bureaucratization vs. informality. The NDN has been flexible, not rule-oriented. Technical assistance should have an emergent quality, although more pre-planning may be necessary.

- Quality vs. quantity in adoptions. There is broad agreement on quality---yet a suspicion that quantity may be politically advisable.

CHAPTER 5

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE EDUCATIONAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE SYSTEMS

The unique functions and needs of NDN members are key determinants of TAAG's recommendations. In addition, though, some general principles of educational technical assistance form a framework within which to tailor technical assistance to the NDN's specific needs. This chapter discusses what technical assistance is, how it can be organized, the specific organizational functions it entails, principles for its membership and internal dynamics, and alternative styles available for its delivery.

Definitions

Educational technical assistance systems are designed to support, strengthen, and facilitate the work of their clients in training, service, or demonstration organizations. Technical assistance systems are networks that transfer information from one place to another, on their own initiative or on demand. They rely heavily upon the energy, initiative, creativity, endurance, and advocacy posture of their members. A technical assistance system is best viewed as a communications network whose members communicate with clients about problems and problem-solving strategies. The technical assistance process has five sequential stages which vary in length and intensity according to the characteristics and developmental level of the client organization. They are:

- program planning,
- needs assessment,
- agreement on technical assistance needs and delivery mode,
- delivery of technical assistance, and
- evaluation of technical assistance and modification of plans.

The Technical Assistance System's Structure and Organization

A technical assistance system addresses interrelated subjects that include:

- program planning and evaluation,
- information and media,
- organizational development,
- critical content areas
(curriculum information, dissemination theories, etc.), and
- resource development.

The staff therefore must include persons who are trained and experienced in these areas and who can perform administrative and communications tasks. The internal staff must usually be augmented by a talent bank or network of part-time consultants who can meet the various special needs that arise in interactions between the system and its clients. The central leadership of the system must have planning, budgeting, and program implementation support.

Some organizational characteristics of the technical assistance system are determined by the nature of the client organizations themselves. Thus, the NDN's high energy and loosely coupled style are factors shaping technical assistance. Other characteristics are determined by structural relations between the client organizations and the technical assistance system, such as the NDN's establishment of informal communication patterns and its resistance to authoritarian approaches. Still other characteristics are shaped by the presence of intermediary structures in the field---State Education Agencies (SEA's), intermediate agencies, Local Education Agencies (LEA's), etc.

An effective technical assistance system, in designing and implementing strategies to meet its goals and objectives, must accommodate to political

and logistical features of the landscape on which it and its clients operate. A lack of attention to the environment is a common defect in organizational design, especially in technical assistance systems. In the case of the NDN's technical assistance, attending to the environment means reading signals from the Office of Education, SEA's, professional associations, and the educational agencies with which SF's and DD's interact.

Alternative structures are available for a system delivering any type of technical assistance to any type of client. A system can be "proximal," developing and delivering technical assistance directly from its own staff, or "distal," relying on consultants or technical assistants who are identified and mobilized by the staff. Of course, combinations are possible as well, but an examination of the two extremes is helpful in designing a structure.

Table 1

Guidelines on the use of Proximal and Distal Systems*

P R O X I M A L	D I S T A L
No formal structures in field	Formal structures in field
Client close to customer	Client remote from customer
Controlled development rate possible	Need for speed of delivery
Quality required	Need for quantity
No talent bank available	Talent bank available
Fewer clients	Many clients
Low budget	Budget adequate

*Donald J. Stedman, "The Technical Assistance System: A New Organizational Form for Improving Education," in National Technical Assistance Systems in Special Education, ed. Maynard C. Reynolds (Minneapolis: Leadership Training Institute/Special Education, Univ. of Minnesota, 1975), p. 17.

Table 1 indicates some guidelines for determining which system, proximal or distal, should be used under given circumstances. In the NDN, the clients, their environment, and their interactions with providers of technical assistance correspond to the following circumstances which favor a distal system:

- There are formal structures in the field with which the technical assistance system must develop proactive or defensive liaison. These include regional offices, state agencies, interest groups, the parent organizations of SF's and DD's, and others.
- The clients are geographically remote from their "customers."
- Technical assistance must be delivered speedily and in great quantity to meet the demands of members of a highly active network.
- A human talent bank can be feasibly developed and afforded.
- Clients outnumber central staff members.

If a distal technical assistance system is managed effectively, it offers these advantages over a proximal system:

- reduced technical bias through identification of consultants whose backgrounds and skills closely fit client needs,
- faster delivery,
- more coverage per day or per client, and
- a broader spectrum of services.

Disadvantages can be found in the distal method, however, unless some pitfalls are carefully avoided:

- costs in both money and error rate if there is a mismatch of consultant and client or poor management of consultants;
- distortion of the results of needs assessment when they are reported or converted into action plans;
- too little information about consultants who are referred, located, and deployed at a distance, unlike the firsthand knowledge that is possible with a central staff;

- less control over the efficiency of participating individuals and agencies; and
- complicated intrasystem communications.

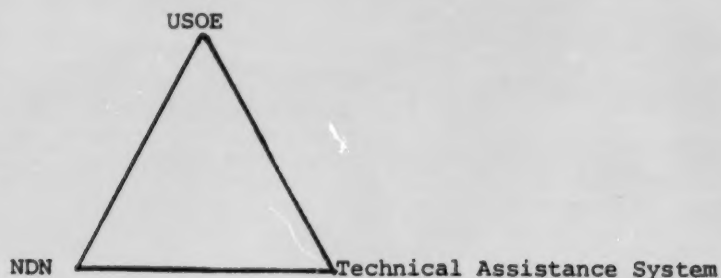
Special Organizational Functions

Besides carrying out its cycle of needs assessment/strategy development/delivery/evaluation, a technical assistance system must engage in liaison, general and specialized information dissemination, and training or capacity building.

Liaison. Successful technical assistance requires not only contact with the client organization but also liaison with other related organizations. Liaison is of the utmost importance with the client's parent organization (such as a DD's local school administration), the parent organization(s) of the technical assistance system, other concerned or interested organizations and individuals (such as SEA's), and professional or interest-group organizations. If technical assistance is viewed---or allowed to be construed---as a clandestine operation, then its delivery is frustrated, distorted, or prevented.

In relationship to the NDN, administrative and communications lines between the technical assistance system and USOE on the one hand and the technical assistance system and the NDN membership on the other, must be addressed. These relationships should form a triangle, not a chain, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1



Specifically, the Federal agency should not place the technical assistance system between itself and the NDN, and the technical assistance system should not maneuver itself into that position. It is not possible for a technical assistance system to be effective as a support system if it is perceived, or actually functions, as an extension of the Federal agency. Since the Federal agency funds NDN member projects and the technical assistance system, there is a built-in tendency to see the technical assistance system as evaluative, not supportive. This perception must be constantly avoided if the arrangement is to work effectively.

General and specialized information dissemination. A technical assistance system must disseminate information about itself, about the goals and objectives of the clients, and, often, about the agency funding it. Such information helps to clarify the intentions and operations of the system, increase the visibility and morale of its staff members, provide credibility to its operations, and sanction the client organizations' engagement with it.

Moreover, in response to special inquiries about the technical assistance system's activities, intentions, and effectiveness, the system must

communicate sporadically and informally with the clients and other key individuals and organizations. This means responding to special information requests and issuing special materials. The system must constantly update the information it supplies to potential and actual clients as well as to members of the talent bank. The communication should always be as personalized as possible.

Training or capacity building. It is often necessary to train clients in how to use technical assistance. Thus a technical assistance system's staff members must engage in training or capacity building both before they establish a technical assistance delivery cycle and during the delivery phase.

The Technical Assistance System's Membership and Internal Dynamics

Important to the effectiveness and credibility of a technical assistance system is the inclusion of an advisory board. This board should include people familiar with the critical content area---in the case of the NDN, this would mean DD's, SF's, and other experts in dissemination and educational improvement. A board should interact frequently with the leadership of the technical assistance system and guide the system's development and operations.

The technical assistance staff must combine process-oriented and product-oriented personnel, ensuring a variety of leadership and operating styles. Both kinds of personnel are needed in needs assessment, since process-oriented staff members can pinpoint needs and product developers can follow through on delivering the required products. Maintenance of liaison, delivery of multiple kinds of services, and evaluation of technical assistance all require both kinds of personnel.

Technical assistance systems differ from traditional consulting groups in two ways. First, since the technical assistance system is a renewal system that advocates changes, its members must be advocates for the consumers served by the client organizations---for educators and students, in the case of the NDN. Second, technical assistance systems consciously violate a basic principle of consultation in attempting simultaneously to establish a trust relationship with a client and to change the client's behavior. (Ordinarily a consultant would first establish trust and then seek behavior change.) To carry out the two activities simultaneously requires experienced, sensitive staff members.

It is critical that staff turnover in technical assistance be as low as possible. Since personal acquaintance between staff members and clients can increase the effectiveness of technical assistance, an interruption of this continuing relationship and communication should be avoided. However, while it is important not to change the operational pattern of the technical assistance system frequently or drastically, the leadership must often interject novelty into the system's operating style to maintain staff motivation.

The timing of technical assistance delivery is also very important. A rapid response to a call for help is paramount, even when speed entails some sacrifice in the quality of the help. Therefore, the tempo and flexibility of the system's staff are critical.

Although the contract relations between the technical assistance system and clients should be specific, it is important for staff members to avoid an overly legalistic approach. Flexibility is always needed to modify technical assistance activities as the client organization grows and changes.

Alternative Styles for Technical Assistance Systems

The style or modus operandi of a technical assistance system may be (1) active or passive, (2) centralized or regionalized, (3) primary or secondary in its visibility, and (4) content laden or content free.

Active-passive. Active technical assistance systems maintain a more aggressive level of activity, generating training, information, and materials designed to assist clients, whether or not the clients identify or request these services. On the other hand, passive technical assistance organizations are simply responsive and attempt to anticipate and maintain the staff and resources that clients are likely to request. A technical assistance system supporting the NDN should operate between these two modes. An active approach seems appropriate with new NDN members, whose needs for technical assistance are the most pressing. Still, a moderate and low-profile approach is sometimes needed with an energetic network such as the NDN, especially since many of the client organizations have clearly defined objectives, well-developed competence in their work, and sophistication in the use of technical assistance.

Centralized-regionalized. A technical assistance system may be a small, highly centralized organization in which a diversified staff deals with the clients' widely varying requirements. On the other hand, a national scope or multi-dimensional technical assistance system must be highly decentralized or regionalized in order to be closer to client organizations and to act as a broker of technical assistance. A technical assistance organization designed to provide support to the NDN should take a regionalized approach in order to emphasize brokered technical assistance and to relate to the geographically and organizationally varied NDN membership.

Primary-secondary. A technical assistance system may function as a primary, highly visible leader organization among its client organizations. On the other hand, a technical assistance system might play a low-profile, backup role as a secondary organization. A technical assistance system designed to support the NDN should be more secondary in its characteristics, concentrating on service to clients. While it should play a role in facilitating communication between the Office of Education and the field, it should avoid a highly visible, primary role in relation to NDN objectives and activities. Neither the government nor the clients would be likely to tolerate the latter kind of role.

Content laden-content free. A technical assistance system might be staffed by content specialists in the area where client organizations operate, or be staffed and organized independent of the clients' content areas or objectives. To meet the technical assistance needs of the NDN, a system should be inclined toward a more content-laden organization; that is, staff members should be educators who are acquainted with research and development in several educational fields and with methods of educational diffusion. The SF's and DD's need specific skills, not just content-free facilitation.

CHAPTER 6

ALTERNATIVE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE NDN'S FUTURE

An appropriate structure and appropriate activities for a technical assistance system serving the NDN will depend in part on the way the NDN itself develops over the next few years. Alternative developments can be envisioned in the network's composition, the respective roles of its members, and its mission. At this point one can only speculate about what alternatives are most likely. Actual developments will depend on the way dissemination is organized in the new department, the appropriations levels for the NDN, the findings of the NETWORK's study of dissemination and school improvement, and other events that cannot yet be anticipated. The technical assistance system should be prepared to meet as many contingencies as possible, however, and so this chapter will explore a few of the possible "futures" for the NDN. It will discuss conceivable developments and the implications of each for technical assistance. First, though, it will summarize some conflicting views of how the NDN is working now---views that imply very different hopes and worries about the future.

Three Images of Today's NDN

Presented below are three different images of how the NDN now operates and what it requires in the way of technical assistance. The images are pieced together from many interviews and observations. It is the judgment of TAAG that the NDN must be understood in terms of all these images, for each of them is realistic. The problem is to make creative plans that accommodate the contradictions and chart feasible paths for the future.

Success! Many NDN members describe the network as new, bright, flourishing, energetic, enthusiastic, hardworking, field-driven, flexible, "a family," audacious, and creative. In sum, it works. It infuses energy into the large educational establishment, and it stands as a remarkable example of Federal leadership without the dulling, consuming, limiting effects stereotypically attributed to bureaucracy. There is truth in all of this, TAAG believes. It is truly notable that almost all NDN members---with the exception of some dispirited Federal program officers---are very proud of their work. They are excited about the NDN and their parts in it.

Doubts creep in. But one also frequently hears comments like these: "Everything is getting more bureaucratic," "We're much more proactive with new DD's," "The system is getting so big that personal interactions are harder to achieve," "The national conference was terrific but 'too big'", "Some SF's are like Madison Avenue hucksters." Running through these concerns about bureaucratic impersonality and commercialism is a common thread of worry---that some people may seek to change the NDN without fully understanding it.

Technical assistance to the NDN system is now less like the reactive, informal, field-generated program that early members knew and still value, and it is an increasingly proactive, structured system. This trend is not total, and, indeed, is contrary to the ideology of leading NDN figures. Nonetheless, the trend is there.

Life on the road. DD's who come from local school systems and who, for the most part, have been successful local innovators in particular curriculum areas, are suddenly exposed to a massive national market in

which to disseminate their ideas, materials, and practices. Some of them achieve scores and even hundreds of adoptions around the country. Most of these DD's are "on the road" much of the time, and some have left their employment in schools to operate as private entrepreneurs. Many see themselves as under-funded, over-traveled, and worn out. They are somewhat confused by the calls for evaluative data that they will have to collect from dozens of broadly scattered adoption sites.

They are "supported" by technical assistance meetings on marketing, managing, evaluating, and similar topics, but they have too little time for such meetings, to say nothing of the problems of implementing newly acquired skills and insights. In the first phases of their work they needed practical help, but later, as experienced DD's, they find that standardized two-day sessions on a topic like evaluation inevitably seem superficial. Who has time for followup or evaluation at dozens of places, or to read all the newsletters, or to answer all the telephone calls and survey forms?

This image of the NDN, like the other two just sketched, must be borne in mind in considering where the network (and its technical assistance) may be headed.

Future Composition of the NDN

Alternatives for the composition of the network have to do with its overall size, the presence of specialized subnetworks, and the length of participation by DD's.

Size. In the short term the NDN will apparently shrink; the Office of Education has projected a decrease in the number of funded DD's in fiscal 1980. Over the next few years, however, the network's sponsors hope for

substantial growth in the number of grantees. If the Administration's 1981 budget request gains Congressional approval, the number of DD's will almost certainly increase in that year (although the increment could also go into increasing the grants of current DD's and SF's). A growing NDN would present several challenges for technical assistance:

- Newly funded projects need orientation, practical advice on the rudiments of their work, and access to the communication channels that have developed in and around the NDN. The technical assistance system would have to fill these needs efficiently for new cohorts of projects.
- A larger network would rely more on standard procedures. Helping to develop new procedures for the NDN's operations (e.g., some standard set of arrangements for financing the training of adopters) and orienting all participants to these procedures would be tasks for the technical assistance system.
- Communications would also be likely to change in a larger network, with greater use of materials and videotapes supplanting some in-person communication. A technical assistance system could develop, test, and facilitate use of new communication methods.

Alternatively, if the hopes of the NDN's sponsors are not met, the network may shrink or disappear over the long term. While decline seems less likely than growth, it is a contingency worth considering in making long-term plans for technical assistance.

- Projects that are about to lose their NDN funding might want advice on alternative sources of funding from the local, state, or Federal levels. The technical assistance system would thus identify funding sources and inform projects about how to use them.
- With the shrinkage or disappearance of the NDN, much useful knowledge about dissemination and school improvement could be lost. The technical assistance system would be an important resource for collecting and preserving this knowledge.

Subnetworks. Some Federal program offices now contribute funds to support DD's in specialized areas, and others are cooperating administratively in special efforts to disseminate projects that fit into particular categorical programs. These developments have spawned "subnetworks" of related DD's within the NDN, and if they continue there will be more subnetworks. Especially in the context of an expanding NDN, the existence of these subnetworks could change the role of technical assistance.

- When some DD's derive part or all of their funding from program offices other than the Division of Educational Replication (DER), they may receive conflicting signals from Washington. A technical assistance system could work to straighten out any confusion that arises between program offices.
- To the extent that they work with different ground rules, DD's in different subnetworks can lose their sense of a common NDN identity. The technical assistance system would therefore have to keep the subnetworks well informed about each other so that fragmentation, misunderstandings, and mistrust do not develop.
- Facilitators working with new subnetworks must become proficient in new vocabularies and learn the needs of new target audiences. To do so, they need some knowledge of the content areas the subnetworks represent. The technical assistance system would have to find and tap information sources in such areas as education of the handicapped, career education, etc.
- Subnetworks aim at specialized audiences of potential adopters. The technical assistance system could help DD's and SF's identify and reach such audiences through pre-existing communication networks such as professional associations at the national and state levels.

What becomes of experienced DD's? New regulations for the NDN say that funded DD projects will lose their JDRP approval after 4 years. Experienced DD's will thus face a choice either to resubmit new data to the JDRP or to retire from the NDN. The Federal government could also encourage their retirement by making continued funding very hard to obtain. If many DD's leave the NDN, the following implications can be expected:

- Assuming a constant or growing level of funding, the NDN would have room for substantial cohorts of new DD's. Orienting these projects would be a responsibility of a technical assistance system.
- Experienced DD's know a great deal about the NDN and school improvement. The technical assistance system could tap this expertise rather than allowing it to be lost when DD's leave the network.
- DD's planning for their departure from the NDN could work together in thinking about their own future options---seeking funds for similar activities either statewide or nationwide, or applying what they have learned to some different facet of school improvement. The technical assistance system could convene meetings and find outside resources to help DD's look into these options.

If experienced DD's in large numbers choose to try to remain in the NDN, a different need will appear:

- Revalidation by the JDRP may well hinge on special criteria. DD's may need technical assistance in preparing resubmissions that address these criteria.

Roles of NDN Members

In the absence of prescriptive edicts from Washington, the role and responsibilities of SF's, DD's, and adopters have evolved over the NDN's history. They will undoubtedly continue to do so, with corresponding implications for technical assistance. Any or all of the following developments in roles could occur; they are not mutually exclusive, and indeed it is likely that within any one role category (such as DD), different NDN members will move in different directions.

DD's. Some DD's have begun to rely more heavily on their own professional networks than on SF's. This trend might accelerate with the addition of subnetworks of DD's, who could make connections individually or as subnetworks with specialized, content-based groups of educators. This form

of entrepreneurship might be encouraged as a way to link the NDN to pre-existing communication channels that efficiently reach potential adopters. Conversely, it might be discouraged as a threat to the smooth functioning of the NDN's own SF-based system.

- DD's that are inclined to develop their own communication networks may need help in identifying and working with the relevant networks. The technical assistance system could provide such help and also help coordinate what might be overlapping activities on the part of different DD's.
- The role of SF's could change if many DD's began to "go it alone." Establishing ground rules for DD-SF interaction and keeping SF's apprised of the DDs' independent network-building could be functions for the technical assistance system.

An alternative scenario for DD's would cast them in a much more limited role. Currently, the demands on a DD's time and skills are enormous: producing information about the program, doing presentations to a variety of audiences, conducting training, and following up adoptions with assistance and evaluation. In the future, a DD's role might be scaled back in order to concentrate on the establishment of a few high-quality adoptions, for example.

- If the DDs' role were reduced in scope, someone would have to carry out some of their current functions. The technical assistance system might pick up some functions itself. For example, a central agency could produce most of the materials about individual DD's. It might also identify or train others to do what DD's are now doing, or explore alternative resources such as the use of videotapes for some of the presentations that DD's now do in person.

State Facilitators. The work of Facilitators could evolve in a number of ways, whether or not DDs' roles also change. One possibility is that a growing NDN with multiple subnetworks will greatly complicate the SFs' tasks by giving them a larger and more varied array of projects to deal with.

- If the NDN grows in size and complexity, SF's will need technical assistance in maintaining their knowledge of and connections with DD projects. Materials such as catalogs and comparison charts will take on increased importance. Face-to-face communication can be encouraged with group meetings, perhaps organized around content areas, and effective alternatives to face-to-face communication will also have to be found. The technical assistance system could produce materials, convene meetings, and test alternative communication methods.

Another possible set of developments for SF's concerns their relationships with State Education Agencies (SEA's).

- Facilitators already work with SEA's, especially in connection with Title IV-C and any other state-administered programs that may offer support for adopting DD projects. Some of them, however, would like more technical assistance in this regard. To multiply the effectiveness of the NDN by connecting it more closely with state activities, the technical assistance system could explore models for cooperative efforts with state agencies.
- If the NDN grows in success and visibility, SEA's may want to draw the SF operations more closely into their own work on school improvement. The technical assistance system could help individual SF's assess this possibility and steer their courses between total submersion in SEA's and total autonomy from them. Since a political risk could develop for the NDN as a whole if SEA's attempted to take over SF operations and SF's resisted strenuously, the technical assistance system should watch closely for emerging tensions.

Turnkey trainers. Because some DD's are in high demand for dissemination and training, the use of turnkey trainers has become appealing. Defining who is an acceptable turnkey and finding useful roles for them may thus become significant challenges.

- Standards for certifying turnkey trainers are not yet clear. The technical assistance system could work on developing NDN-wide criteria for certification and could also help DD's develop their own, project-specific criteria.
- With their close acquaintance with a DD project, turnkey trainers may have ideas about how to modify the project, perhaps improving upon its original form. Would it at some

point become a new project which should be submitted to the JDRP? Alternatively, the technical assistance system might convene DD's, turnkey trainers, and others to examine the possibility of "families" of projects. A "family" would consist of several different adaptations of a single DD that would be appropriate for different settings. Formative evaluation techniques could provide validation for each of these adaptations. Developing such techniques, or identifying and deploying the relevant expertise, could be technical assistance responsibilities.

Adopters. The adopters of NDN projects may be viewed both as potential clients for technical assistance and as an insufficiently tapped source of ideas and assistance in the network.

- As a way of improving the quality of adoptions or addressing a broader school-improvement mission, the NDN might do more general training, consultation, and technical assistance with potential adopters. SF's now carry out this role, but they might do more of it, and they might need more technical assistance in doing it. Alternatively, the technical assistance system could itself launch more general training and assistance efforts with potential adopters, or at least connect potential adopters with other programs and agencies that provide leadership training, organization development, schoolwide inservice, and so forth.
- Schools that have adopted some DD projects have banded together in regional "adopter networks" to help each other in the implementation process. Such networks may also serve some turnkey function since they are a source of accessible information on the myriad questions that come up in implementation. Some SF's and DD's have encouraged adopter networks, and others could be given technical assistance in doing so.

Mission of the NDN

Thinking as broadly as possible about what the NDN does, some alternative views of its contribution to American education can be developed. As the program evolves, as other dissemination programs that address complementary goals evolve, and as knowledge is developed about school improvement processes, the conceptual basis for the NDN's functions could change.

Commitment to a modified mission would be especially appropriate if the NDN were placed under a broader organizational umbrella covering several interrelated Federal dissemination efforts.

Program replication. One possibility is that the current official view of the NDN's mission will remain in force. The NDN would then continue to work for the faithful replication of exemplary projects in adopting sites. Refining and implementing this mission would engage the technical assistance system in the following ways:

- The definition of "adoption" is still unclear enough to be a source of anxiety to NDN members. What are the essential elements of a project? More broadly, who decides what they are? The technical assistance system has a role to play in focusing attention on this issue, pushing for some operational solution, acquainting all NDN members with this solution, and continuing to raise the issue if it continues to be a problem.
- Having decided that replication is the goal, policymakers must offer more guidance on the choice between quantity and quality in adoptions. NDN members are not yet sure how much quantity they can safely sacrifice for quality. Again, the technical assistance system could continue to focus thinking on this issue.

Educational improvement through inservice training. Contributing to the professional development and improved performance of adopters is already part of the NDN's mission, of course. This goal could become a more central focus, partially displacing project replication as the NDN's standard of success. What the NDN would then try to bring about would be serious and sustained local efforts at educational improvement, stimulated by the examples of DD projects and incorporating training, assistance, and monitoring by SF's and DD's. This would not mean endorsing the very limited, fragmentary adoption of components of exemplary projects. Instead, an NDN with this mission would define successful results in terms of

improved capabilities and outcomes at adopting sites, and it would tolerate the purposeful modification of the original DD models. Shifting to such a view would require several changes:

- New criteria for success would be needed. Rather than measuring the fidelity of project adoption and then looking for student outcomes, evaluation would consist of formative and summative examination of the specific results that are desired at the local improvement sites. For example, new staff behaviors and a schoolwide focus on new goals could be desirable short-term outcomes. Improved results for learners would be the long-term goal in most cases. The technical assistance system could work with NDN members to explore ways to keep the network accountable for success under this view of its mission.
- With inservice training as a more central focus, the NDN would need to forge stronger connections with other educational staff-development efforts, both locally and nationally. The technical assistance system should identify relevant professional networks and help NDN members locate these resources for themselves and their clients.
- The technical assistance system itself could provide some training and assistance to the local sites conducting improvement efforts.

Information-based educational improvement. The NDN now has the mission of promoting what can be called "information-based improvement" in educational programs. This is true in two senses. First, the NDN is confined to projects that can provide convincing information about their effectiveness in one or more sites. It also increasingly encourages adopters and NDN members to use information as an integral part of the implementation of new programs; it encourages them to carry out formative evaluation, which means continually scrutinizing just what is being implemented and how it is working. In the long run, this second sense of the term seems almost certain to be a key contribution of the NDN since the use of information in formative evaluation can engage educational practitioners in a new

approach to their work. It could therefore be judged appropriate to re-define the NDN's central aim in terms of information-based school improvement. This policy decision would have the following implications:

- Increased attention would be given to the process of validation. The technical assistance system could expand its efforts to help projects prepare for JDRP submission, and it could organize some studies of alternative procedures and criteria for the JDRP to use.
- The goals and techniques of formative evaluation would be continually refined. An issue needing special attention would be the use of evaluative information in local decisionmaking. The NDN would presumably take on the goal of encouraging local sites to make frequent, routine program adjustments in response to formative evaluation data. The technical assistance system could continue to take initiative in improving the quality and usefulness of such evaluation.
- The NDN's connection to other Federal and state systems for information-based improvement should be strengthened. The resources of these systems (e.g., the Title I TACs, the RDx, the RRC's for the handicapped) would complement the NDN's efforts, and the technical assistance system could find ways to bring this about.

CHAPTER 7

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING AND IMPROVING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO THE NDN

The recommendations that appear in this chapter represent a consensus among the five members of TAAG. They are based on the material reviewed in this report: the historical record, data on current technical assistance and needs in the NDN, principles of effective technical assistance, and future options facing the NDN. The first part of the chapter lists all the recommendations. The second part elaborates upon them in a format that displays, under each recommendation, the observations and rationale that led TAAG to develop it and any cautions or conditions that TAAG attaches to it.

Recommendations Concerning the RFP and Contract for Technical Assistance

1. A single contract should be awarded for technical assistance which would include and integrate all technical assistance services.
2. The contract for technical assistance should cover a 3-to 5-year time period.
3. The technical assistance contract should provide for developmental work on technical assistance. Both the government and the contractor should recognize that technical assistance services must change and improve as these services are continually evaluated, as the contractor learns about the evolving functions and organization of analogous technical assistance systems, as the NDN evolves, and as more is learned about dissemination and school improvement.
4. If the total budget for the NDN remains the same, the amount allocated to technical assistance should remain approximately 10 percent. If the total budget for the NDN increases, then the percentage allocated to technical assistance should be expanded to accommodate new functions, many of which are detailed below.
5. Within the total budget allocation for technical assistance, no more than one-third should be allocated to publications and media production. Overall, less money should be spent on administrative recordkeeping and more money should be spent on direct technical assistance to DD's and SF's.

6. The technical assistance budget should be flexible so that materials and other kinds of technical assistance can be developed for DD's, SF's, and the NDN as a whole as needs arise.
7. The technical assistance contractor must have adequate staff and resources to help DD's and SF's develop and package effective project materials such as awareness brochures, training materials, and videotapes as they are needed for dissemination.
8. The section on "staffing" in the RFP should emphasize the requirement for competence and experience in staff and organizational development and in evaluation on the part of the technical assistance contractor. The technical assistance contractor should also be required to demonstrate experience and competence in working with new NDN clients like colleges and universities, special education resource people, vocational and adult educators, etc.
9. The technical assistance contractor should be required to establish a technical assistance advisory board which would include NDN participants (DD's and SF's) and other professionals who are knowledgeable about technical assistance and dissemination. The advisory board should include members from other disciplines such as the behavioral sciences, pediatrics, sociology, government or public administration, communication sciences, higher education, and parents and teachers organizations. TAAG further recommends that the technical assistance contractor should consider establishing separate advisory boards for some of the special components in its scope of work, such as publications and evaluation.
10. The technical assistance contractor should be required in its proposal to describe in detail the essential recordkeeping/documentation procedures it will use. Points should be awarded for parsimonious data collection and easy compilation.

Recommendations Concerning the Structure, Roles, and Functions of a Technical Assistance System

11. A decentralized-regionalized technical assistance system is most consistent with, and can contribute the most to, the development of the NDN. The RFP should delineate functions and responsibilities of the centralized and decentralized-regionalized components of the technical assistance system.

Functions for which the centralized component should be formally responsible, many of which are discussed separately below in other recommendations, include:

- a. current administrative functions related to the management of the budget and payment of vouchers, etc.;
- b. documentation and recordkeeping;

- c. system-wide planning on the basis of national needs, including planning of the national conference in conjunction with Federal officials;
- d. formulation of issues and identification of problems for policy consideration within the NDN and Department of Education through the use of special study groups of NDN participants, the compilation of needs assessment data, and work with the technical assistance advisory board;
- e. identification of new types and categories of DD's needed to assist in the overall improvement of education in the United States;
- f. planning for evaluation; development of alternative formative and summative evaluation models for use by NDN participants; and training of NDN participants in evaluation;
- g. assistance in the definition and clarification of the roles and tasks of DD's and SF's if the NDN grows and incorporates new kinds of projects;
- h. conceptualization and development of alternative technical assistance strategies such as a resource bank, DD and SF sharing sessions, small-scale developmental projects, and minigrants, etc;
- i. identification of resource people, development of a consultant resource bank, and training of consultants;
- j. assistance in networking NDN membership through the establishment of an 800 number for easy access to information and help;
- k. workshop coordination and planning in response to identified DD and SF needs;
- l. training of new DD's and SF's;
- m. orientation and training of new "subnetworks" of NDN participants, e.g., Title I projects or special education projects;
- n. compiling information and orienting SF's to new NDN projects;
- o. public relations and marketing, including the development of brochures and videotapes, television spots, journal and newspaper stories;
- p. development and printing of publications, including newsletters, for use within and outside the NDN;
- q. planning and development of a computerized information system within the NDN;

- r. negotiation of decentralized-regional initiatives; assessment of regional effectiveness and the value of products developed; and promotion of communication across regions so each region knows the others' resources;
- s. assistance to the regions in deciding what technical assistance is best offered through workshops, network or subnetwork meetings, individual consultation, study groups, minigrants or small scale developmental projects, or sharing sessions;
- t. supplying the decentralized-regionalized units with formative evaluation data and feedback that will help them improve the services they are providing DD's, SF's and other agencies;
- u. staff development for decentralized-regionalized technical assistance providers;
- v. development of relationships with other national dissemination networks and technical assistance systems; and
- w. formation of and work with the technical assistance advisory board.

Other components of the technical assistance system should be decentralized to geographic regions. The decentralized-regionalized functions, many of which are discussed separately below, include:

- a. DD and SF needs assessments;
- b. development of an individual technical assistance plan for each DD and SF;
- c. promotion of problem-solving and sharing on a regional basis;
- d. evaluation and followup to national conferences and workshops on a regional basis;
- e. support of DD's and SF's through frequent onsite visits and telephone contacts;
- f. links for local, state, and Federal officials with the NDN and with each other in their regions;
- g. bringing in Federal officials to clarify policies and expectations with SF's and DD's;
- h. regional linkages with colleges, universities, regional labs, and research and development centers;
- i. work with school-level decisionmakers, content specialists in SEA's, and resource people in professional associations who can help SF's and DD's facilitate the adoption of NDN projects; and
- j. assistance to exemplary projects in preparing for and going through the JDRP.

12. The technical assistance contractor should develop a consultant resource bank including outside consultants and NDN participants. A staff member with the technical assistance contractor should be assigned full-time responsibility for managing the resource bank and for actively working with projects to identify needs and match them with resource bank assistance.
13. The technical assistance contractor should make frequent use of successful and experienced DD's and SF's to work with and support new DD's and SF's.
14. The technical assistance contractor should encourage decentralized-region-alized units to occasionally work on a state-by-state basis with SF's, DD's, and adopters. This assistance would facilitate needs assessment and evaluation within a state and promote sharing and communication among projects that are likely to be working with the same local schools and schools that are adopting the same innovation. The technical assistance contractor should also occasionally organize conferences of DD's working in the same content area.
15. A balance should be sought in the amount of technical assistance provided in large group meetings on general topics versus the amount provided on an individual project basis. When group meetings are planned, they should be scheduled well in advance (sooner than the current RSU's are scheduling).
16. The technical assistance contractor should orient all NDN participants and relevant Federal officials to the range and types of technical assistance services that are available. The contractor should assist DD's and SF's in the use of NDN publications by offering workshops and providing information on this topic.
17. The technical assistance contractor should consider providing orientation to the NDN for administrators from districts and agencies holding DD grants.
18. The technical assistance contractor should encourage DD's and SF's to include elementary and secondary school-level decisionmakers in NDN workshops and conferences focused on the development of skills in organizational change and evaluation (where appropriate) so that they acquire the skills needed to adopt new programs and to provide special assistance to exemplary projects about to go through JDRP.
19. The technical assistance contractor should assume an expanded public relations and information role and develop new publications and articles about the NDN and its projects for new audiences such as legislators, school board members, parents, colleges and universities, professional associations, and the general public. As much as possible, SF's and DD's should be involved in the expanded public relations and information function.
20. The technical assistance contractor, along with SF's and DD's, should work with institutions of higher education, with SEA's and intermediate agencies, with teachers' centers, and with other agencies as potential adopters and to encourage these agencies to provide ongoing support and staff development to adopters of NDN projects in local schools.

21. When DD projects apply for dissemination funding, they should submit a plan for national dissemination. Approved applications for funding as a DD should then be shared with the technical assistance contractor since they are ready sources of information for needs assessment data. At a minimum, the technical assistance contractor should provide validated projects with print materials on "how to develop a dissemination plan." Optimally, the technical assistance contractor should have a primary role in helping newly funded projects think through and define what it is they are offering for adoption, the key components of their programs, and what the adoption procedures will be before engaging in full-scale dissemination.
22. As new categorical projects come into the NDN, separate technical assistance contracts or systems should not be set up. Rather, the NDN's technical assistance contractor should be responsible for providing the subnetwork projects with special assistance and for orienting SF's, if necessary, to whatever special requirements these projects may have.
23. The technical assistance contractor should evaluate the quality, effectiveness, and use of all of its publications. It may be possible to reduce the number of publications while still serving the needs of the NDN.
24. The technical assistance contractor should "translate" Federal policy and expectations for SF's and DD's work in evaluation. The contractor should also develop or subcontract for the development of alternative strategies for evaluating the quality and impact of adoptions at adoption sites.
25. The technical assistance contractor should provide forums for capturing NDN members' expertise on their work---e.g., on what makes for "successful" DD's and SF's, "successful" adoptions, "successful" awareness and training strategies, etc.
26. The technical assistance contractor should help the government and NDN members define the policy questions facing the National Diffusion Network by surfacing problems, dilemmas, and conflicts for NDN participants, conveying members' perspectives and making suggestions to the government on ways to solve or manage the problems. Some current examples of problems or issues of concern to many NDN participants include: confusion over the definition of an adoption; differences in the ways states handle Title IV-C monies; inconsistency among projects and states in making financial arrangements for awareness and training sessions; questions about how a DD should operate when the project has a very high number of adoptions; the need for guidelines about how SF's can make the most effective use of DD's; and unclear standards for certifying turnkey trainers. Small task forces that include OE staff members, NDN participants, and consultants should be set up to collaborate to find solutions to these problems.

Recommendations Concerning the Relationship of the Technical Assistance Contractor and the Office of Education

27. One program officer within the Division of Educational Replication (DER) should monitor the entire technical assistance contract. This officer should also be responsible for continuing orientation of his/her colleagues in DER about the technical assistance operation.
28. Provision should be made for more frequent communication between DER program officers and the technical assistance contractor. Similarly, the technical assistance contractor should work closely with program officers in other offices and agencies that have projects in the NDN. Program officers should attend technical assistance workshops and conferences.
29. Each program officer within DER should be assigned to work with SF's and DD's within a single geographic region.
30. The DER should examine the long-range consequences of growth in the number of projects included in the NDN and growth in the number of sub-networks. The consequences of this growth should be examined for both the NDN and technical assistance to the NDN.
31. The DER should provide leadership within the Department of Education to develop a long-range plan for the dissemination of exemplary practices in education. The plan should examine the functions of the NDN, SEA's, ROEP's, and other agencies in this effort.

Observations, Rationales, and Cautions Associated with Recommendations

1. A single contract should be awarded for technical assistance which would include and integrate all technical assistance services.

Observations

In the past there has been little coordination or communication between the two technical assistance contractors, although this is improving. Because the ED Center has not been well integrated into TAB's technical assistance efforts, it has not been able to be as responsive as it might have been to TAB and, in some cases, SFs' and DDs' needs for new materials and publications. Similarly, TAB has not been able to help SF's and DD's use the ED Center's materials most effectively.

Rationale

With a single contract, there would be better coordination. The publications function would be more responsive to project's needs for new materials. As well, a single technical assistance contractor would be in a better position to develop cooperative relationships with other technical assistance agencies, to provide consistent messages to the field, and to develop efficient planning, reporting, and evaluation systems.

In the absence of a formal contractual relationship between parts of a technical assistance system, Federal urgings are not likely to produce enough coordination.

Cautions/Conditions

By recommending a single contract, TAAG is not implying that services in the past have been unsatisfactory. The materials produced by the ED Materials/Support Center are highly professional and in some cases are the primary means NDN participants have for learning about the network. TAB services have also been appropriate and well received by network participants.

By recommending a single contract, TAAG is not endorsing a centralized technical assistance system. Independent subcontractors could be used to carry out many aspects of the work plan or various tasks could be assigned to regional offices of the technical assistance system. What TAAG is hoping for with this recommendation is more coordination and joint planning between what have been two relatively isolated operations.

2. The contract for technical assistance should cover a 3-to 5-year time period.

Observations

The short contracts (1 year, 6 months, 18 months) have been disruptive to the development of an effective technical assistance system in the NDN in the past. Moreover, NDN participants are just now beginning to use and appreciate technical assistance services.

Rationale

If the NDN is entering an important period of expansion and development, there is a need for the technical assistance contractor to be relatively free from the anxieties and troubles of reapplying for funding.

Cautions/Conditions

Such a relatively long-term contract would need to be entered into with an "experimental" attitude by all parties. During the period of the contract, there should be an evaluation of the technical assistance effort and changes in the types of technical assistance provided if they seem warranted. The relationships between the technical assistance contractor and DER should be open to change and development, as well.

3. The technical assistance contract should provide for developmental work on technical assistance. Both the government and the contractor should recognize that technical assistance services must change and improve as these services are continually evaluated, as the contractor learns about the evolving functions and organization of analogous technical assistance systems, as the NDN evolves, and as more is learned about dissemination and school improvement.

Observations

The evolution that has already taken place in technical assistance has been observed and appreciated by many NDN members, although it seems that current technical assistance services have not been designed with much knowledge of analogous systems for technical assistance and staff development. Fairly significant changes in the knowledge base on dissemination and in the NDN's policy environment can be anticipated.

Rationale

The contract should be sufficiently flexible to encourage the contractor to acquire and apply new knowledge about technical assistance and the NDN.

Cautions/Conditions

Modifications in the technical assistance contract should be negotiated between the government and the contractor within the 3- to 5-year contract period.

4. If the total budget for the NDN remains the same, the amount allocated to technical assistance should remain approximately 10 percent. If the total budget for the NDN increases (as TAAG believes it should), then the percentage allocated to technical assistance should be expanded to accommodate new functions, many of which are detailed below.

Observations

At the current overall funding level, additional funds should not be allocated to technical assistance at the expense of SF and DD grants.

Rationale

There is little waste of money in the technical assistance system now, and there are creative ideas that could be implemented or expanded with extra funds.

Cautions/Conditions

5. Within the total budget allocation for technical assistance, no more than one-third should be allocated to publications and media production. Overall, less money should be spent on administrative recordkeeping, and more money should be spent on direct technical assistance to DD's and SF's.

Observations

The ED Center's products are of high quality, but there may be too many of them.

The NDN in general, and technical assistance in particular, suffers from excessive recordkeeping.

Rationale

Technical assistance should primarily be oriented to staff development. Based on the assumption that the NDN is going to grow in size and complexity (i.e., different kinds of projects), the amount allocated to human resource development rather than product development should be higher.

Cautions/Conditions

All of the publications the ED Materials/Support Center produces should be evaluated. TAAG feels that some may not be being used and may not need to be printed, thereby reducing the publications budget.

6. The technical assistance budget should be flexible so that materials and other kinds of technical assistance can be developed for DD's, SF's, and the NDN as a whole, as needs arise.

Observations

Until now, the ED Materials/Support Center contract has not been flexible enough to allow the Center to address needs that have emerged during the contract period.

Rationale

One of the principal values of a technical assistance system is its ability to be responsive as needs arise. This requires budgetary flexibility.

Cautions/Conditions

There should be a close examination of the needs to see if they really address the principal objectives of the NDN, SF's, and DD's.

7. The technical assistance contractor must have adequate staff and resources to help DD's and SF's develop and package effective project materials such as awareness brochures, training materials, and videotapes as they are needed for dissemination.

Observations

There has not been adequate funding or staff resources to provide this kind of assistance except in an infrequent, informal way. Virtually every new project wants such assistance.

Rationale

This is an area in which there is specific technical expertise that can be brought to bear on NDN members' needs.

Cautions/Conditions

8. The section on "staffing" in the RFP should emphasize the requirement for competence and experience in staff and organizational development and in evaluation on the part of the technical assistance contractor. The technical assistance contractor should also be required to demonstrate experience and competence in working with new NDN clients like colleges and universities, special education resources people, vocational and adult educators.

Observations

Assistance in "evaluation" was the number one need of almost all of the developer-demonstrator projects we interviewed. Currently, there are a number of evaluation efforts going on in the region which tend to be fragmented, uncoordinated, and confusing to the projects.

Rationale

Technical assistance is basically a staff development activity. The technical assistance contractor needs to have that orientation in mind and be familiar with a wide variety of staff development strategies and approaches in order to be effective. Furthermore, persons with evaluation expertise should be able to help projects meet OE demands for quantitative and qualitative evaluation. Persons with familiarity with new clients like colleges and universities and vocational educators will be able to help projects work more effectively with these groups.

Cautions/Conditions

In making this recommendation, TAAG is not necessarily recommending that the contractor employ leading theoreticians or experts in these fields on its regular staff; TAAG believes that the contractor needs to be aware of where the best resources are in these fields.

9. The technical assistance contractor should be required to establish a technical assistance advisory board which would include NDN participants (DD's and SF's) and other professionals who are knowledgeable about technical assistance and dissemination. The advisory board should include members from other disciplines such as the behavioral sciences, pediatrics, sociology, government or public administration, communications sciences, higher education, and parents' and teachers' organizations.

Observations

At present, the RSU's tend to serve as an informal advisory group, but others feel left out. Some feel that decisionmaking is a private, even "clublike," activity.

Rationale

People who are actively providing technical assistance often find it hard to "step back and consider" what they are doing. A strong technical assistance system needs information, perspective, and support from a broad range of advisors, particularly if centralized leadership is increased. An advisory board could offer the technical assistance contractor a useful perspective if it combined the views of clients and those of outside observers.

Cautions/Conditions

DD's need to be included on the advisory board because they have felt they have not been able to influence decisionmaking in relation to technical assistance in the past.

10. The technical assistance contractor should be required in its proposal to describe in detail the essential recordkeeping/documentation procedures it will use. Points should be awarded for parsimonious data collection and easy compilation.

Observations

"There's too much paperwork." "TAB does too much analysis of the technical assistance process and consequently provide less technical assistance." These statements were among the most emphatic findings emerging from TAAG's interviews with NDN members who have received technical assistance.

Rationale

Much of the impetus for extensive recordkeeping appears to stem from the Office of Education. TAAG believes the government should attempt to limit the documentation of technical assistance to a level below the current level. The central technical assistance contractor needs to be concerned with organizing as a major task, not with paperwork.

Cautions/Conditions

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11. A decentralized-regionalized technical assistance system is most consistent with, and can contribute the most to, the development of the NDN. The RFP should delineate functions and responsibilities of the centralized and decentralized-regionalized components of the technical assistance system.

Observations

Many efforts to strengthen or improve the skills of NDN participants have come about in the past because staff members in the RSU's have taken the initiative on particular topics. The system has grown in areas where there are regional interests, in a fairly ad hoc fashion. Until now, the CSU has functioned as an office for a consortium of five relatively independent technical assistance agencies. At this point in the development of an effective technical assistance system for the NDN, a more systematic perspective on problems and priorities could be taken if several of the initiatives were centrally coordinated.

Rationale

By assigning certain functions and responsibilities to a central technical assistance agency, issues and priorities that affect the entire NDN will be more systematically and effectively addressed. By facilitating joint planning and coordination, there will be less duplication among regional units.

By maintaining a regional structure, the advantages of proximity, proactivity, and personal contact for needs assessment, support, and followup are maintained.

Cautions/Conditions

TAAG does not believe that a centralized technical assistance organization necessarily has the skills to perform all of the functions listed with its own staff. Many of them could be assigned to regional operations if the best expertise to perform the task is located there, or they could be subcontracted. By legitimizing the subcontracting authority of the central technical assistance agency, it should be possible to go to the best sources for the development of ideas, training materials, assessment procedures, etc., whether these are within or outside the NDN.

In strengthening the role of the central technical assistance contractor, however, TAAG feels that great care should be taken to preserve the valuable sense of ownership SF's and DD's have in the NDN. This suggests that the central technical assistance contractor would do well to utilize the talents, insights, and commitment of experienced NDN participants as advisors and consultants, etc.

12. The technical assistance contractor should develop a consultant resource bank including outside consultants and NDN participants. A staff member with the technical assistance contractor should be assigned full-time responsibility for managing the resource bank and for actively working with projects to identify needs and match them with resource bank assistance.

Observations

One-on-one technical assistance is often valuable since some needs are unique to one project.

NDN members generally have the best expertise in the specific roles and tasks associated with NDN participation.

"Outsiders" contribute a needed balance of fresh ideas. They can be especially helpful to experienced members who are trying to develop greater sophistication in training, marketing, evaluation, etc.

Rationale

A centralized resource bank makes the best resources in the country available to projects wherever they are located. It also tends to break down regional isolationism. A centralized resource bank can also be more cost effective than each project using self-identified consultants.

Cautions/Conditions

All persons and agencies included in the resource bank should be oriented to and, if possible, have experience with the NDN.

A resource bank is not an end in itself; it must be part of an active and continual process of brokering needs and resources.

13. The technical assistance contractor should make frequent use of successful and experienced DD's and SF's to work with and support new DD's and SF's.

Observations

New DD's need a great deal of help and support which experienced DD's can provide. They also tend to value highly the help given to them by experienced DD's; there are some experienced DD's who would like to help in this way.

Experienced DD's should be more extensively involved and their expertise should be recognized.

Rationale

It is consistent with the NDN's history to use what NDN participants have learned through their work to socialize new participants to the Network.

Cautions/Conditions

Overuse of some individuals creates "stars" who are always visible, which would defeat the purpose of this recommendation. Overuse of some DD's and SF's may in fact interfere with the effective functioning of their programs.

15. A balance should be sought in the amount of technical assistance provided in large group meetings on general topics versus the amount of technical assistance provided on an individual project basis. When group meetings are planned, they should be scheduled well in advance (sooner than the current RSU's are scheduling).

Observations

Lately, there has been a tendency to schedule more large group sessions because they seem to be cost effective. Most projects feel these meetings are helpful, but they also do not report doing very much with what they learn at these sessions.

SF's and DD's tend to have very busy travel schedules; many find they cannot attend meetings without several weeks or months notice.

Rationale

Technical assistance needs to be both uniform and differentiated. Experienced DD's and SF's are more likely to need more highly individualized help, whereas the needs of new DD's and SF's can often be anticipated and planned for in large group meetings. The technical assistance contractor should also help experienced DD's develop effective self-instructional, packaged training materials and new training strategies, and should help them get together to share exemplary practices, ideas, resources, and problems.

Cautions/Conditions

One-on-one consultation is effective for those DD's and SF's that are experienced enough to know how to use it. For less experienced DD's and SF's, the variety of experiences and information that can be presented in large group meetings can be effective.

14. The technical assistance contractor should encourage decentralized-regionalized units to work occasionally on a state-by-state basis with SF's, DD's, and adopters. This assistance would facilitate needs assessment and evaluation within a state and promote sharing and communication among projects which are likely to be working with the same local schools and schools that are adopting the same innovation.

The technical assistance contractor should also be encouraged occasionally to organize conferences of DD's working in the same content area.

Observations

Some State Facilitators restricted in terms of time and travel thought that state meetings would facilitate their work in a state and allow for more sharing and planning.

Several DD's suggested content-area meetings.

Rationale

In some states, external assistance is needed to get needs assessment and evaluation activities going.

Communication among like projects would cut down on duplication, and projects might be able to refer schools to other projects that are more appropriate to that school's needs. Technical assistance may also be provided on a more cost effective basis if these projects are grouped.

Cautions/Conditions

There is some danger that a state-by-state effort could lead to further fragmentation of the Network and the technical assistance services provided to the Network.

16. The technical assistance contractor should orient all NDN participants and relevant Federal officials to the range and types of technical assistance services and publications that are available. The technical assistance contractor should assist DD's and SF's in the use of NDN publications by offering workshops and providing information on this topic.

Observations

Many NDN members and some Federal officials are unaware of what they can legitimately ask TAB or ED to do. They say they could use the services better if they had a "menu" of what is available.

Until now the ED Materials/Support Center has functioned primarily as a publishing house. They have not trained projects on how to use the materials they publish most effectively. Consequently, some projects make good but limited use of ED Materials publications, others use them extensively with school districts to create interest, and others only use them internally.

Rationale

An orientation would lead to much more efficient use of the available services.

The ED Materials/Support Center (or the technical assistance contractor if there is only one contractor) is in the best position to learn how some projects use the materials with potential adopters and to share these strategies with others in order to get the most mileage out of their publications.

Cautions/Conditions

Because of staff turnover on projects, not all new participants are in new projects. The contractor should be sure to orient individuals who are new to the NDN.

The staff members with responsibility for publications will need assistance and support in this "training" function.

17. The technical assistance contractor should consider providing orientation to the NDN to administrators from districts and agencies holding DD grants.

Observations

Many DD's say they suffer from a poor understanding of their work on the part of their local administrators.

Rationale

Decisionmakers who participate in this orientation will have a better sense of demands made on DD's and the support they need to do their work. They will also have a better sense of the budgetary and leadership support needed.

Cautions/Conditions

18. The technical assistance contractor should encourage DD's and SF's to include elementary and secondary school decisionmakers in NDN workshops and conferences focused on the development of skills in organizational change and evaluation. By participating in these workshops, school-level decisionmakers will acquire skills needed to help schools adopt new programs and to provide special assistance to exemplary projects about to go through JDRP.

Observations

DD's and SF's are having to take on the responsibility of marketing their own innovations as well as readying school systems for change. These tasks often demand too much of DD's.

Rationale

More successful quality adoptions are likely to occur when school-level decisionmakers have these skills.

Cautions/Conditions

This activity could get expensive. The contractor should seek out other sources for technical assistance and training so that potential adopters do not absorb too many of the contractor's resources for SF's and DD's.

19. The technical assistance contractor should assume an expanded public relations and information role by developing new publications and articles about the NDN and its projects for new audiences such as legislators, school board members, parents, colleges and universities, professional associations, and the general public. As much as possible, experienced SF's and DD's should be involved in the public relations and information function.

Observations

Most of the materials the ED Materials/Support Center now publish are directed at NDN participants. Although these materials have been very effective in promoting the NDN with its members, individual projects now carry much of the burden for informing other audiences about the NDN. Increasingly, individual projects and State Facilitators seem to be generating endless numbers of publications for use with local schools. Expense is high and schools are often overloaded.

Rationale

This function can be carried out more efficiently on a centralized basis.

The NDN would benefit from increased publicity and public knowledge of the Network and Network projects; consequently, SFs' and DDs' work with school systems would be easier.

Cautions/Conditions

This could be an expensive undertaking. Plans should be made carefully, perhaps in conjunction with publications of other offices and agencies.

20. The technical assistance contractor, along with SF's and DD's should work with institutions of higher education, with SEA's and intermediate agencies, with teachers' centers, and with other agencies as potential adopters and to provide ongoing support and staff development to adopters of NDN projects in local schools.

Observations

There appears to be an underemphasis on broader problems of dissemination and of the needs of school administrators, curriculum specialists, parents, and others whose understanding, leadership, and support are required for major educational innovations to succeed. The technical assistance contractor and SF's and DD's may never have adequate resources to do followup and ongoing staff development.

Rationale

Effective dissemination of major educational innovations requires a broad and systematic approach to the problems of change. A larger part of NDN's efforts, and, subsequently, of the technical assistance effort, needs to address problems related to this larger context; efforts cannot relate only to the specialty area of the innovation, and the technical competence of DD and assistance contractor needs to involve other agencies in an ongoing effort to support adopters in local schools. In addition, SF's and DD's need to consider how to influence teacher preparation programs so that their innovations are included in the preservice training of teachers.

Cautions/Conditions

NDN resources are not sufficient, of course, to permit a broadscale assistance effort to all school personnel, all colleges, all teacher centers, and the like. It will be necessary to target the broader technical assistance effort on selected adopter sites and related support centers.

21. When DD projects apply for dissemination funding, they should submit a plan for national dissemination. Approved applications for funding as a DD should then be shared with the technical assistance contractor since these applications are ready sources of information for needs assessment data. At a minimum, the technical assistance contractor should provide validated projects with print materials on "how to develop a dissemination plan." Optimally, the technical assistance contractor should have a primary role in helping newly funded projects think through and define what it is they are offering for adoption, the key components of their programs, and what the adoption procedures will be before engaging in full-scale dissemination.

Observations

New DD's invariably experience start-up problems, and seemingly very little information is now communicated from the funding decision process to the technical assistance contractor.

Rationale

Projects need time and technical assistance to set objectives, develop formative and summative evaluation procedures, build relationships with SF's, and develop needed awareness and training materials before actually engaging in a national dissemination effort.

The contractor could address needs more promptly if grant applications were shared. In addition, further needs assessments would not duplicate existing information.

Cautions/Conditions

DD's must be made aware that information about their proposals---including outside evaluations---will be shared with the technical assistance contractor.

The technical assistance contractor should not have any responsibilities for evaluating requests for funding.

22. As new categorical projects come into the NDN, separate technical assistance contracts or systems should not be set up. Rather, the NDN's technical assistance contractor should be responsible for providing the subnetwork projects with special assistance and for orienting SF's, if necessary, to whatever special requirements these projects may have.

Observations

When subnetworks are established within NDN, they tend to cause confusion if special conditions are created for them, e.g., if funding arrangements are different for the subnetwork projects than for other projects.

Rationale

Subnetworks bring with them a serious danger of fragmentation in the NDN. If the different subnetworks had different technical assistance systems, they would be more likely to receive contradictory messages on policies and procedures. The result would almost certainly be increased confusion and fragmentation.

Cautions/Conditions

The criteria for the inclusion of new projects and new subnetworks into the NDN and the linkage of these projects to the existing technical assistance system need to be very clearly spelled out by DER since TAAG feels that these projects will make the SFs' and the technical assistance system's jobs increasingly complex.

The Federal program offices associated with new subnetworks should be expected to contribute money to the technical assistance contract when they join the NDN to offset the costs of special assistance and training to SF's and the projects themselves.

TAAG recognizes that when new content areas join the DD pool, expertise in these areas will be needed as a part of technical assistance. Our point here is that one technical assistance contractor should orchestrate the identification and use of such expertise.

23. The technical assistance contractor should evaluate the quality, effectiveness, and use of all of its publications. It may be possible to reduce the number of publications while still serving the needs of the NDN.

Observations

Many people that TAAG interviewed felt that there were too many publications.

Rationale

Fewer publications would be more cost effective and duplication could be avoided. Also, fewer publications may result in better quality and better use of what is published.

Cautions/Conditions

The use of lengthy and frequent evaluation forms and processes should be avoided.

24. The technical assistance contractor should "translate" Federal policy and expectations for SFs' and DDs' work in evaluation. The contractor should also develop or subcontract for the development of strategies for evaluating the quality and impact of adoptions at adoption sites.

Observations

Evaluation is the highest priority problem for NDN members. At present there seems to be a lot of uncoordinated efforts in the whole area of evaluation as well as unclear expectations for what is required. They want and need more clarity about the goals for their work in evaluation; they need more systematic help with evaluation strategies.

Rationale

The technical assistance contractor should actively address this need. In the final analysis, dissemination efforts are judged effective when implementation can be measured in some way.

Cautions/Conditions

Alternative procedures should be provided rather than a single model.

25. The technical assistance contractor should provide forums for capturing NDN members' expertise on their work---e.g., on what make for "successful" DD's and SF's, "successful" adoptions, "successful" awareness and training strategies, etc.

Observations

Opportunities are being missed for systematic understandings of the diffusion process in specific adoption sites and its effects on the larger social context.

Rationale

There may be more knowledge in NDN about how to introduce new knowledge into schools than in many other federally-sponsored projects. At present, this knowledge is not being shared.

Cautions/Conditions

This recommendation assumes the involvement of the experienced DD's and SF's in such forums. This work by a contractor close to the Network's operations can usefully supplement studies conducted from a more detached perspective.

26. The technical assistance contractor should help the government and NDN members define the policy issues facing the National Diffusion Network by surfacing problems, dilemmas, and conflicts for NDN participants, and by conveying members' perspectives and making suggestions to the government on ways to solve or manage the problems. Some current examples of problems or issues of concern to many NDN participants include: confusion over the definition of an adoption; differences in the way states handle IV-C monies; inconsistency among projects and states in making financial arrangements for awareness and training sessions; questions about how a DD should operate when the project has a very high number of adoptions; the need for guidelines about how SF's can make the most effective use of DD's; and unclear standards for certifying turnkey trainers. Small task forces that include OE staff members, NDN participants, and consultants should collaborate to find solutions to these problems.

Observations

At any given time, certain problems and issues tend to concern many NDN members. No one is now formally responsible for identifying such issues for wide discussion and OE consideration.

Rationale

The technical assistance contractor is well situated to know what is important to NDN members and to raise questions outside the formal authority relationships that may constrain communications between DER and the field.

Cautions/Conditions

It is not the role of the technical assistance contractor to solve these difficult problems, but rather to provide a forum for developing solutions.

27. One program officer within DER should monitor the entire technical assistance contract. This officer should also be responsible for continuing orientation of his/her colleagues in DER to the technical assistance operation.

Observations

There has been little coordination between the two current contractors.

Rationale

This recommendation is even more logical if a single contract is awarded.

Cautions/Conditions

This recommendation should not result in less involvement of other DER staff in technical assistance activities. Indeed, it should increase communication and involvement.

28. Provision should be made for more frequent communication between DER program officers and the technical assistance contractor. Similarly, the technical assistance contractor should work closely with program officers and other offices and agencies that have projects in the NDN. Program officers should attend technical assistance workshops and conferences.

Observations

Program officers report that they do not get any follow-up reports on referrals to TAB for technical assistance; they do not even know if contact is made.

Communications in the past have been weak, but recent meetings seem to have improved the situation.

Rationale

Program officers, if they had more frequent contact with TAB and with their projects, could serve as a communication link to TAB alerting the technical assistance contractor to "system" and "individual project" needs.

Cautions/Conditions

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29. Each program officer within DER should be assigned to work with SF's and DD's within a single geographic region.

Observations

Program officers now are not visiting their projects on a regular basis.

Rationale

This arrangement would be cost effective and would be likely to facilitate program officers' opportunities to get out to visit the projects they work with.

Cautions/Conditions

Special care should be taken to coordinate the technical assistance contractor with program officers and NDN members.

30. The OE (DER) should examine the long-range consequences of growth in the number of projects included in the NDN and growth in the number of subnetworks. The consequences of this growth should be examined for both the NDN and technical assistance given to the NDN.

Observations

The NDN is changing as it grows. Its operations are becoming more impersonal, and a greater need for standardized procedures is being felt.

Rationale

The consequences of a larger, more complex NDN for technical assistance should be assessed. There is some danger that a technical assistance contractor will have to devote inordinate time and energy to keeping track of the NDN's intricacy and, in doing so, the contractor could help perpetuate too much bureaucratization.

Cautions/Conditions

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31. The DER should provide leadership within the Department of Education to develop a long-range plan for the dissemination of exemplary practices in education. The plan should examine the functions of the NDN, SEA's, ROEP's, and other agencies in this effort.

Observations

The dissemination of exemplary practices in education, particularly those which have been developed in federally supported projects, seems to be an appropriate and important activity of the Department of Education. The NDN activities have been impressive, but growth and planning for growth seem lacking.

Rationale

Dissemination activities are of sufficient importance to warrant careful attention by officers of the highest levels of the Department of Education.

Cautions/Conditions

It may be difficult for DER to give leadership in this study unless and until its own operations are further clarified and improved.

TAAG is also concerned that there has not been enough serious consideration of the valuable school improvement that can result from partial adoptions and adaptations of exemplary projects. It should be recognized that what is replicable from one project to another may be only selected, outstanding aspects of projects.

APPENDIX A: TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ADVISORY GROUP

Dr. Ann Lieberman
Teachers College
New York, NY

Dr. Maynard Reynolds
National Support Systems Project
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, MN

Dr. Donald Stedman
University of North Carolina
General Administration
Chapel Hill, NC

Dr. Brenda Turnbull
Institute for Educational Policy Studies
Harvard Graduate School of Education
Cambridge, MA

Dr. Patricia Zigarmi, TAAG Chairperson
National Staff Development Council
Oxford, OH

APPENDIX B: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

INTERVIEW FORMAT

State Facilitators (SF)/Developer Demonstrators (DD)
National Diffusion Network (NDN)

1. DDs - What is the name of your project?
 - Location(s) (agency and geographic)
 - When was it validated? When were you funded?
 - How many adoptions?
 - What's a typical month like for you? (Percentage of time spent on NDN vs. other projects. Percentages spent continuing program, training in and out of state, improving own skills.)
1. SFs - Name?
 - Agency location?
 - How long have you been a SF?
 - Are there other people in your state who work part or full time with you as state facilitators?
 - What's a typical month like for you?
2. Do you receive technical assistance from TAB?
 - If so, what objective(s) is the TA designed to help you meet?
 - What are the major forms of TA received?
 - Is the TA helpful to your work?
 - How do you know it is helpful?
 - Is the TA timely? That is, is the response time of TAB rapid enough?
3. Do you evaluate the technical assistance TAB provides to you? What is your evaluation?
 - Do you want more TA from TAB? Less?
 - If so, what TA do you want? Don't want?
 - What improvements in the TA process would you recommend - for TAB - generally?
4. Have you ever worked as a consultant for TAB/ED to other projects? On what topics?
5. What are your top 3 technical assistance needs in 1979-80? What changes would you make to improve your program's effectiveness? (Do you plan to receive such TA? If so, when and from whom? If not, why not?)

6. What other sources of TA do you have access to? Do you use them?
If so, why? If not, why not?
7. Do you receive technical assistance from ED Materials/Support Center?
 - If so, what objective(s) is the TA designed to help you meet?
 - What are the major forms of TA received?
 - Is the TA helpful to your work?
 - How do you know it is helpful?
 - Is the TA timely? That is, is the response time of ED Materials/Support Center rapid enough?
8. Do you evaluate the technical assistance ED Materials/Support Center provides to you? What is your evaluation?
 - Do you want more TA from ED Materials/Support Center? Less?
 - If so, what TA do you want? Don't want?
 - What improvements in the TA process would you recommend - for ED Materials/Support Center - generally?
9. Do you have general and/or specific recommendations for OE concerning its provision of TA to NDN members? If so, what are they?

(Encourage SFs and DDs to write you with evaluation comments and both general and specific recommendations.)

Probes:
 - a. Decentralized vs. centralized system.
 - b. Meetings on topics of shared interest vs. one-on-one consultation.
 - c. Staff of TAB providing services vs. consultants; consultants TAB identifies vs. consultants you identify.
 - d. Do you think TA needs vary as a function of how long the project has been in the network?
 - e. Proactive vs. reactive.
10. Have you thought about alternative models for TA? What are your ideas?
11. What questions should I have asked that I didn't? (Ask them.)
12. Would you be willing to talk with us again in person at a meeting? If we sent a one-page questionnaire would you be willing to complete it?

TAGG
Draft Interview Schedule
for RSU/CSU

Interviewers:

Interviewees: a)

b)

c)

Agency:

Dates:

Instructions: Please record interviewee responses in substance directly on the form under appropriate general headings.

I. CLIENTS

Who are your clients?

What are their roles in NDN?

How do you spend your time and how is it distributed among people you service? (new, old, specialized, SFs, DDs, 1st year.)

How do you assign priorities to various client groups?

II. GOALS, PURPOSES - TA

What are the main things you do?

- Do you do
- a) Needs assessment
 - b) Long range planning
 - c) Evaluation/feedback
 - d) Follow up
 - e) Support
 - f) % of time in each

- What else would you like to be doing
- a) keep doing
 - b) stop doing
 - c) new activities not presently involved in
 - d) what are the constraints to what you like to do?

III. BUDGET

- a. What is it?
- b. Is it adequate?
- c. Breakdown per client, per state.
- d. Admin./Support - Breakdown by category of functions (probe).

IV. TIME LINE

How do you schedule work over the year?

How does Federal time line work out with your time line?

Can you mesh Federal time line and people you serve?

How do you deal short range, long range?

What do you take into account when scheduling?

V. STAFFING

What are desirable characteristics of those who give TA?

What have you learned about what skills are necessary? (Background? Skills? Experience?)

What staff development do TAs need? others?

Who does what in your staff?

How do you use outside resources? How does it work?

Do you use consultants? How are they used? Are any on long term continuous contracts with you or do you use them on a single shot request-only basis?

VI. HISTORY

Services - how have they changed over time?

What is the effect of adding new program dimensions? (new types of programs, e.g. BEH, Title I, and new clients, e.g. librarians, etc.)

VII. RELATIONSHIPS TO OTHER GROUPS

What are communication links and coordination between you and -

- a. RSU-CSU/Break out regions separately - I, II, III, IV, V?
- b. You and Project Office?
- c. You and ED Materials/Support Center?
- d. You and NDN (Big 4)?
- e. You and SFs and DDs?
- f. You and Host Organization?
- g. You and other clients (SEAs)?
- h. You and the large professional community?

What uses, if any, do you make of other TA systems?

How trustful or competitive are your relationships?

VIII. PROJECT CULTURE

- a. Climate
- b. Rewards/Satisfaction: What's motivating you to give TA?
- c. Are there special constraints on you that others do not have?
- d. Characterize TA system as: permanent-temporary
formal-informal
high-low energy
ingroups vs. outgroups
credible-noncredible.
- e. How well are clients using you and your services?

IX. TA STYLE

Do you search out needs or wait to be called? (proactive-reactive)
Do some DDs and SFs never call?
What do you do about them?

Do you provide direct services or try to build capacities of SFs and DDs?

Content or Processes
Workshops or Consultations (give examples)

Do you buffer SFs, DDs, State Dept., etc.? For whom, with whom (advocacy, etc.)?

Expectations and actual role.

What are the most frequent topics for your TA activities? (e.g. evaluation, project management, curricula, product development, institutionalization, client-specific content, etc.)

X. TA DELIVERY MIX - STRATEGIES

Which do you do? (conferences, workshops, brokering, providing materials, information services, training, etc.)

How do you decide?

Sequenced over time?

View of effectiveness of one strategy over another.

In what circumstances is one more effective than another?

Constraints - what are they?

XI. EFFECTIVENESS

What are your successes?
(accomplishments)

What type of evidence should be used to point to effectiveness of TA?

Do you have any of that information? What is it? Why not?

How do you evaluate the effectiveness of each encounter?

XII. RECOMMENDATIONS/ALTERNATIVES

What are obstacles to more effective TA thru NDN?

Money	Resources	Change	Contractors
Staff	Trust	Politics	Time

Is there a better way to organize and offer TA?

If you had to make recommendations to Commissioner of Education, what would they be?

Is geographic breakdown useful in NDN? (problems, strengths)

What are your ideas about the long-range development of broad (beyond present NDN) Federal systems for TA in education?

TAAG
Draft Interview Schedule
for ED

Interviewers:

Interviewees: a)

b)

c)

Agency:

Dates:

Instructions: Please record interviewee responses in substance directly on the form under appropriate general headings.

I. CLIENTS

Who are your clients?

How do you spend your time and how is it distributed among people you service? (new, old, specialized, SFs, DDs, 1st year.)

How do you assign priorities to various client groups?

II. GOALS, PURPOSES - TA

What are the main things you do?

What would you like to a) keep doing

b) stop doing

c) new activities not presently involved in

d) what are the constraints to what you'd like to do?

III. BUDGET

- a. What is it?
- b. Is it adequate?
- c. Breakdown per client, per state.
- d. Admin./Support - Breakdown by category of functions (probe).

IV. TIME LINE

How do you schedule work over the year?

How does Federal time line work out with your time line?

Can you mesh time lines of Federal personnel and the people you serve?

How do you deal short range, long range?

What do you take into account when scheduling?

V. STAFFING

What are desirable characteristics of the professionals who work on the ED staff?

What have you learned about what skills are necessary? (Background? Skills? Experience?)

What are the major staff development needs of ED staff?

Do you use consultants? How are they used? Are any on long term continuous contracts with you or do you use them on a single shot request-only basis?

VI. HISTORY

Services - how have they changed over time?

How has your client population changed?

How have the needs of DER changed over the year as they affect your operations?

What is the effect of adding new program dimensions? (new types of programs, e.g. BEH, Title I, and new clients, e.g. librarians, etc.)

VII. RELATIONSHIPS TO OTHER GROUPS

What are communication links and coordination between you and -

- a. RSU-CSU/Break out regions separately - I, II, III, IV, V?
- b. You and Project Officers? DER leadership?
- c. You and SFs and DDs?
- d. You and Host Organization?
- e. You and other clients such as other OE officers, OE regional officer, BEH, Title I, etc.?
- f. You and the larger professional community?

How trustful or competitive are your relationships?

VIII. PROJECT CULTURE

- a. Climate
- b. Rewards/Satisfaction: What's motivating you to work with NDN?
- c. Are there special constraints on you that others do not have?
- d. Characterize the system as: permanent-temporary
formal-informal
high-low energy
ingroups vs. outgroups
credible-noncredible.
- e. How well are clients using you and your services?

IX. TA STYLE

Do you search out needs or wait for suggestions? (proactive-reactive)

How do you decide to launch a publication?

What advisory services do you employ? And how does this work?

What is the relative power of DER staff and others in advising on ED operations?

X. EFFECTIVENESS

What are your successes?
(accomplishments)

What type of evidence should be used to point to effectiveness of
your operations?

Do you have any of that information? What is it?

How do you evaluate the effectiveness of each activity and product?

XI. RECOMMENDATIONS/ALTERNATIVES

What are the obstacles to the more effective operations of your program?

Money	Resources	Change	Contractors
Staff	Trust	Politics	Time

Is there a better way to organize and offer TAB and ED services?

If you had to make recommendations to Commissioner of Education, what
would they be?

What are your ideas about the long-range development of broad (beyond
present NDN) Federal systems for TA in education?

TAAG
OE Program Officer Interview Schedule
Interviewer(s) _____
Interviewee _____
Monitors SFs/DDs _____
Date _____

1. Does TAB provide technical assistance to the projects that you monitor?

In general, does it seem to help them? In what ways?
Which kinds of projects benefit most? Least?
Should TAB provide more of some kinds of TA? Less of some kinds?

2. Has TAB been helpful to you? How?

3. Does TAB coordinate with you?

4. Does ED provide technical assistance to the project that you monitor?

In general, does it seem to help them? In what ways?
Which kinds of projects seem to benefit most? Least?
Should ED provide more of some kinds of TA? Less of some kinds?

5. Has ED been helpful to you? How?

6. Does ED coordinate with you?

7. What technical assistance do you provide?

What objectives do you try to help projects meet?
Do you or the projects initiate most of these interactions?

8. What are the top three technical assistance needs of the projects that you monitor?

Do different groups of projects have different needs?
How are they grouped? (e.g., old/new, size, geography)

9. What sources of technical assistance are available to the projects?

Do the projects use these sources? Why or why not?

10. Would you like your own role in technical assistance to change? How?

11. What recommendations do you have for the provision of technical assistance in the NDN?

What alternatives should OE consider?

12. What are the obstacles to more effective technical assistance in the NDN?

13. Any other comments or suggestions?